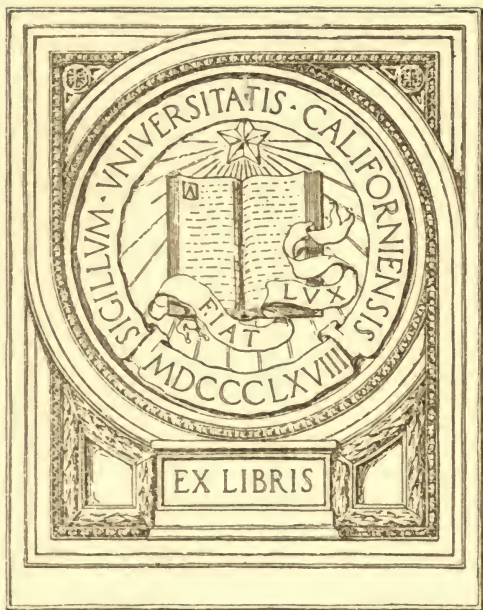


THE VAGABOND

FREDERICK PALMER



955
P173
x



THE
JOURNAL
OF
THE
ROYAL ANTHROPOLOGICAL INSTITUTE
OF GREAT BRITAIN AND IRELAND
VOLUME LXXV. PART I. 1905.



1891

The Vagabond himself under a white flag rode beside her

THE VAGABOND

By

FREDERICK PALMER

Illustrated by

HARRISON FISHER

CHARLES SCRIBNER'S SONS

NEW YORK : : : : : 1909

COPYRIGHT, 1903, BY
COLLIER'S WEEKLY

COPYRIGHT, 1903, BY
CHARLES SCRIBNER'S SONS

Published, September, 1903



PS
3531
A365
V3
1909
MAN

CONTENTS

| | PAGE |
|--|------|
| I. A CRUST MAY BE SWEET | 1 |
| II. FOUR OF THE SIX INCHES | 18 |
| III. AND FOUR PROVE ENOUGH | 24 |
| IV. IF YOU HOLD YOUR HEAD HIGH | 33 |
| V. AND SMILE AT OGRES | 43 |
| VI. OR STIFF OLD DRILL SERGEANTS | 55 |
| VII. UNLESS THEY TAKE TO REASONING | 66 |
| VIII. WHEN YOU MUST START AFRESH | 78 |
| IX. FEARING NOT A JUDICIAL MIEN | 84 |
| X. BUT MEETING LOGIC WITH FAITH | 90 |
| XI. THAT WINS YOU A PASSAGE | 98 |
| XII. TO THE RAINBOW'S END | 110 |
| XIII. WHICH IS PLACER, NOT QUARTZ | 118 |
| XIV. ENTER JIMMY POOL | 127 |
| XV. IMPULSE BETRAYS A SECRET | 137 |
| XVI. THE MISTS ON THE PLAIN | 141 |
| XVII. MISS FELICIA AS AN AUNT | 149 |
| XVIII. HIS HORSE CASTS A SHOE | 157 |
| XIX. THE SHADOW OF WAR | 166 |
| XX. WITH EVERY MAN'S DUTY PLAIN | 181 |
| XXI. TO HER DOOR BY FORCE | 188 |
| XXII. FOLLY TAKES BREAKER'S PLACE | 203 |
| XXIII. WAR SHOULD BE IMPERSONAL | 217 |

CONTENTS

| | PAGE |
|---|------|
| XXIV. A TARGET FOR HER SAKE | 223 |
| XXV. FATHER BOB ILLUSTRATES | 235 |
| XXVI. BULLETS HAVE NO SENTIMENT | 242 |
| XXVII. AT LAST A CHARGE | 247 |
| XXVIII. NOT THE SAME FELICIA | 258 |
| XXIX. NEEDING AN EXCUSE | 274 |
| XXX. HE TELLS HIS STORY | 283 |
| XXXI. A RULE OF WAR | 295 |
| XXXII. "YOU, AGAIN!" | 303 |
| XXXIII. IN HER KEEPING | 311 |
| XXXIV. DEEPER THAN SHE THOUGHT | 318 |
| XXXV. THE GENERAL DRINKS ALONE | 323 |
| XXXVI. SOUTHBRIDGE APPEARS | 328 |
| XXXVII. WHEN THE BACK-LOG FELL | 337 |
| XXXVIII. SABRE TO SABRE | 348 |
| XXXIX. UNCERTAINTY | 361 |
| XL. THE LONG WAIT | 373 |
| XLI. A SERVANT OF THE LANLEYS | 383 |
| XLII. A RECOGNITION | 390 |
| XLIII. WHICH HAS LIMITS | 401 |
| XLIV. TO RISK IS TO PAY | 409 |
| XLV. WHEN LIFE CALLS | 415 |
| XLVI. TO LIE AND LIE WELL | 423 |
| XLVII. JIMMY RECONSIDERS | 431 |
| XLVIII. MARCUS, THE STRATEGIST | 441 |
| XLIX. A CHOICE OF FUTURES | 454 |
| L. BACK TO LANLEYTON | 463 |

THE VAGABOND

PART I

I

A CRUST MAY BE SWEET

You of the East know the house, a type of the first quarter of the late century, as do you of the West who have retraced your own or your father's brave migratory steps. It stands some distance back from the road, repelling gossip with passers-by, a monument to a man who invited an early grave for the sake of his posterity. Firs and elms shade the porch where the builder never sat except on warm Sunday afternoons, when he rested by worrying about the crops. If it is in good repair, then either all the sons have not been scattered by the four winds of industrial change or some "hired man" of Jim Rawkins's type has had his turn at grubbing the hill-side for a rise in the world. If the bricks are tumbling from the spreading chimney-top; if the steps have rotted and fallen away; if the ridges of the clapboards are so many brown, weather-worn lines, in a land where youth passes into age which begets new youth swiftly and confidently, then it is only dismal: a little too common between the Alleghenies and the Atlantic to be pathetic, unless it happens that you

THE VAGABOND

were born there and your misfortunes tell you that of all that the close-fisted man planted, only the trees thrive.

In the forties when the boy dwelt there, no hand was lifted to stay the swift ruin of that homestead which concerns us only so far as it outlines the inception of a vagabond's fancy. He recalled indistinctly a pilgrimage from some distant place with Ann. Thin, angular, undemonstrative, with automatic precision she bathed him, fed him, and put him to bed. He thought of her as never smiling, as only blinking like the sedate andirons in front of the fireplace. Not until the day of her departure, when he was five, did she show any sentiment beyond the woodeny "Lay me down to sleep" that she had taught him. Jim Rawkins's buckboard was at the side door; her hair-trunk was under the seat, and her tongue was once more her own, when she suddenly threw her arms around her late charge, smothering in a motherly kiss her cry that he was a poor little dear. A big hand swept between them. Ann, frightened at her temerity, hastily stepped into the buckboard without looking back as Rawkins drove away. A voice from above the big hand, which had returned to its listless attitude in the trousers' pocket at about the height of the boy's head, drawled:

"William, that's the last of the women."

Thitherto, as he recalled it in later years, the boy's idea of his father had been of something large and indefinite, as a ship bulking through a fog. In the flash of a camera's shutter a new impression of frigid detail, as clear as the outlines of a leafless tree against the snow, was formed for all time. He saw the wreck

THE VAGABOND

of a fine, tall figure, slouching and stooping, in a rusty suit; a high nose, thin at the bridge and thin at the nostrils; a thin-lipped mouth with drooping corners; a lump of a chin dimly outlined through an untrimmed, sparse beard, which began well below the cheek-bones; the whole furrowed and criss-crossed too deeply for its age by self-indulgence, ill-sitting pride, disappointment, and indecision, and yet somewhat redeemed by the high, capacious forehead, which was at best only a storehouse.

In that moment when, after one of his brief and rare splurges of resolute action, the elder's mind had flown to some wandering recollection, William Williams, Jr., slipped away unobserved and ran to the front door and called to the passing buckboard:

"Good-by, Ann! You were good, oh, so good, if you always were so sober. Good-by, Ann! I love you!"

Rawkins drove on mercilessly at a trot. Poor Ann's face lighted as it had not during her whole period of service. She partly rose in her seat and called back in gulps:

"I had to be that way to keep my place and get my pay! The sunshine wuz there when you wuz there. You wait—you wait! You shed your misery like the duck does the rain. You wait till you're big enough and then you run away—you *run away*"—the last words came with the terror of conscience-driven courage.

"I will!" the boy said, decidedly, as much to himself as to Ann, who was already out of hearing.

In such a setting, poetic justice may demand that young William should have had deep, soulful eyes,

THE VAGABOND

wan cheeks, and a peaked chin, with a head too heavy for its supporting column; that he should have been an unsuccessful dreamer, who would make life a weary course, with sad reflections on self at every step. He was nothing of the kind; was to be nothing of the kind, no matter how thick the shafts of adversity. When Tragedy precipitated him into the world she must have been repentant and envious of the cheer which finds its crust as sweet as the promise of the cake it aims to win.

Well might his father, looking into the mirror and then at his son, have cried out that he had an alien at his board—as he had, except in blood. For young William was equipped with a chin; his nose was short; his head round, and two bumps of perception and quizzical fancy overhung his keen, dancing eyes of a blue that does not fade. Under the gas-light of a drawing-room they might have seemed too solid and prominent of color. In the open, in a great emergency, they promised to be as tranquil as the midsummer sky. And the more the offspring was unlike the parent, the more the parent, if he had such a thing as a consistent object, wanted to make him like.

The son was still watching the cloud of dust rolling along between the two fences of the highway when his father materialized at his side and turned him around with an abrupt pressure on the shoulder.

"This is a man's house now!" he almost shouted; which was saying that it was less than a woman's, not even a boy's. "Come! I'll have no petticoats teaching you, but you've got to learn."

He led him into the library, and, placing him on

THE VAGABOND

a high-backed chair next to the wall, began a catechism on the spelling of short words.

"That's enough now," he said, after an hour or more. "You'll begin your Latin next year."

William had borne the trial patiently, struggling hard with the tri-syllables to escape censure. He had already learned the folly of putting unscholastic questions. Yet now, in juvenile wonder, as the idea came to him, he asked on the impulse:

"Father, did you ever laugh?"

William, Sr., put up his hands spasmodically, and looked everywhere except at William, Jr.

"Yes, oh, yes, I have, fool that I was!" he replied, tragically; and, seizing his hat and stick, he rushed out of the house. From the window the boy saw him going across the fields in great strides, driving his stick into the ground with every step, as if pinioning so many hated recollections.

His story was an old one, exceptional only in the way he took it. Because he had been "smart" at books he had been given a "grand" education to make him superior to his surroundings. Alas! he had taken the intention for the fact, and gone to the city in the full swing of petty confidence. The city had dealt him one of those broadsword blows with which the Deity of striving numbers tests those whom she tries for high places, and this candidate retreated to nurse his wound with the lasting irritant of his chagrin.

All this the neighbors knew and took it for fuel for sarcasm or for felicitations to the fortune of the first Williams in having died before it came about. They also knew that it was none of their business—

THE VAGABOND

when it came to the point of being a good thing for Jim Rawkins. Jim was the only human being with whom the father ever spoke, though if in the humor he might nod to anyone whom he met in the road when he went to Jim's to get pastry and clean linen, which were a part of the earning power of thin, stoop-shouldered Mrs. Rawkins.

Jim's squat two stories, with its great barn adjoining, was the only house visible, the only one, besides his own, that the boy had ever seen except in books. Beyond it was a knoll which hid the village and the rest of the world. To the north were the woods, and in all directions were fields of snow in winter, fields of green in spring, and fields of gold in autumn. Expanses and bold, clear strokes rather than etchings appealed to him. He loved the snow, the green, and the gold; he loved even more the dome of the sky when it was a still blue; and he loved most a thunderstorm, when he would press his face against the window-pane and smile delightedly over each clap, while his father, in a corner, instinctively flinched. Above all things, he hated a drizzling, rainy day, which reminded him of his father's scraggly beard, obscuring the hills as the beard did the chin. A great pine on the edge of the woods, clean-trunked to a height of a hundred feet, pointed a finger majestically toward the west. This was his favorite object on the landscape. Near its roots ran a stream, rollicking past the knoll into the unknown as if trying to escape from the darkness, winding and glistening. The stream where it gurgled over the stones seemed a good place to play. He could not take it seriously as he did the tree, whose magnificence appealed to his heart.

THE VAGABOND

For more than a year after Ann's departure he knew no companion except his lessons and his father. Then he made his first friend. Often he had watched Rawkins's farm-hands working in the fields, envying their activity. One of them, of six feet two or three, had particularly interested him. The giant reminded the boy of the pine-tree, even as Jim Rawkins reminded him of a twisted shrub. On a June day, when desire overleapt parental warning and his father nodded over a book, he approached his hero.

"My name's William Williams. I'm the little boy that lives in the old house yonder," he said, tentatively.

The giant stopped heaping the warm earth around the green shoots and, throwing back his head, broke into a roaring laugh, which gained in volume till it finally cracked. William, Jr., was in doubt whether or not he would better run. He concluded to stay.

"My name's Tim Booker," the giant replied, finally, when his mirth had been reduced to the limits of as expansive a grin as his broad mouth could master, "and I'm hoeing corn twenty-four hours a day for Mister James Rawkins for sixteen dollars a month. Figure that out for yourself, if you know arithmetic."

Thereupon, Tim took a corn-cob pipe out of his pocket and began filling it, enjoying the attitude of the boy, who regarded him sharply and dubiously and finally said, with portentous conviction:

"Twenty-four's all the hours there are in a day. When do you sleep, Tim?"

At that, Tim roared again. William, Jr., had heard very little laughter; he had never dreamed of such a laugh as this. He liked the life and movement of it. He liked Tim for all time.

THE VAGABOND

"Honest Injun," Tim rejoined, "I guess sixteen hours is nearer right." He bent over his interlocutor, mischief triumphant in his glance: "You've found me out, bub. Ordinary things you can see for yourself. When you say 'em, it's wearing on the spirits and makes plain vittles taste no better than they are. What's the use of talking unless you talk big? That's my motto. Why, sometimes when the sods are tough and the stones thick I just make it up that I'm one of them mediæval knights that I've read about, a-riding toward his castle on a horse that cuffs his ears with every step, he's so prancing, and I say, 'Hoe, warder, hoe!' and it helps a lot."

"When you talk big your eyes twinkle, don't they, Tim? And when you talk straight they're like the water in the pool."

Thus they had a basis of understanding at once.

For his temerity, William, Jr., was whipped and set upon his high-backed chair and made to conjugate "to be" in Latin twice, and still he was unconquered. Square chin meeting a lump of a chin, some compromise was inevitable. It was agreed that he might talk to the farm-hand when Tim was in either of the fields nearest to the house.

How Tim helped! The prisoner followed him in the corn-rows of spring and the swaths of harvest, listening to his tales, rejoicing in his laugh, yet not seeing too much of his friend to excite more than his father's passing displeasure. The cunning of the hunted was his from necessity. He knew that if he ran away before he was large enough to run well, he would be caught; and he waited, in a cheery confidence that one day he would depart and keep on going

THE VAGABOND

until he had seen all the world. Of nothing was he so certain as that after his release he would never want to stay long in any one place, but would always be on the go. In an old geography, soon after Ann had gone, he had seen a wood-cut of a famous peak. That was far more magnificent than the pine-tree; indeed, it carried pine-trees on its back as easily as a draught-horse a fly. Thenceforth, his greatest ambition was to climb a mountain. He would lie on his back on a summer's day and see a range of peaks cutting the horizon in every direction. His other diversion was making pictures. The father tore up his sketches and took his pencils away, and still he kept on drawing.

The secret of his coming excursion into the world he kept from Tim—even from Tim—for some time, as he did for many years another secret whose origin dated from one of his visits to a pool in the wood near the pine. There he saw a little girl on hands and knees on the fallen tree that had dammed the brook, all intent upon the water beneath. He had seen girls before, passing in buggies, but he had never spoken to any of them. This one might have fallen from the skies so far as any earthly connection was concerned. He approached cautiously, as to a covey, by a detour which brought him to the bank a few yards behind the phenomenon. A patch of sunlight glinted upon the phenomenon's hair, which had the color and sheen of a chestnut just out of the burr. Splash! A pebble was dropped into the water and a small voice from the Vision, which was intent on the ripples, piped:

“Now it's not a mirror! Now it's a lake!”

THE VAGABOND

The boy realized, with his already quick grasp of any situation which lay within his sight, that her life was in his hands. If he were to startle her, being such a *very* little girl, she would fall in. He must remain quiet, in the hope that she would return safely to the bank.

The water grew still.

"Now you've come back," said the voice, which was softer than any he knew, that of a Southern clime. "How do you do, little girl? Why don't you say 'how do you do,' too? You're not very polite. I'll put you in the dark closet. You sha'n't have any ice-cream for a week."

Ice-cream must be something very good, the boy supposed; he had never tasted it.

Another pebble dropped—her last. Childhood had pursued one fancy long enough. She clapped her hands at the sight of a lily of the valley, whose solitary root clung to the naked earth of the bank, and began, with what she thought was the greatest care, to slip down from the log toward it and certain disaster.

With that keenness of eye for position of objects of one who had gazed across the fields so much and seen so little of men, the place for every step between him and the log was mapped in his mind. He sprang forward lightly and surefootedly and grasped the sash of her pinafore.

"A boy's got you! Don't cry!" he said, with the assurance of chivalry.

All unsuspecting of danger, she glanced back at him with the matter-of-factness of playing house; for she was used to the appearance of allies to aid her to her heart's desires.

THE VAGABOND

"Hold on tight!" she admonished. "I can just weach it."

As he assisted her to the bank she was in nowise conscious of the part that he had played. He was as slow to mention it as he would have been twenty years later. The joy of a deed itself was ever enough for him. He felt a glow of triumph such as could never spring from a lesson well learned. She scrutinized him in the manner, however young, of class confronting class. In return, he scrutinized her as if she were a new species of humanity. His gaze hung on two features, which he was always to remember: the tiny mole on her chin and her hair. She was the first to speak.

"What is your name, little boy?"

As she asked the question, the mole on her chin blinked oddly, charmingly, into a dimple. He had never seen anything human like this smile. He beheld it in a kind of enchanted surprise to find that the world contained any face so unlined by care. The glow of it permeated him and made eight years confronting five seem a giant capable of mighty things.

"But I'm not a *little* boy," he said, wrathfully.

"You're not a—a *man*," she replied, judicially shaking her head. "If you're not a *little* boy, you're a boy. What's your name, boy?"

"William Williams."

"How can it be? Boys aren't called John Johns and Tom Toms. What is your other name 'side Williams?"

"William Williams's all I know," he replied.

"How funny!" she exclaimed, as she sat down at the foot of the pine. "William Williams is like

THE VAGABOND

church. I know two Williams and they're both Billies for short. I'll call you Billy. Thank you, Billy, for coming to play with me, and do sit down. I was quite lonely," continued the Vision. "Do you ever get lonely, Billy?"

"Do I!" He drew a deep breath. "Whew! Do I! Do you have lots of boys and girls to play with?"

"My, yes! There's a whole ring around the rosey of us at the Post—Jack and Harry and Mary and Alice and Tommy—lots of us; and lots of soldiers, and the band plays, and once papa let me stay up and I peeked in at a real ball."

"What is a post?"

"It's the place where the army lives; big barracks for the men and houses for the officers; two big pillars in front and the sentry walking up and down looking just as neat and smart as he can, so's not to be scolded or put in the guard-house. The guard-house's his dark closet."

"What is a *real* ball?"

"A ball! You don't know what a ball is, either? Well, you *are* a little boy!"

"A big boy that doesn't know much, I guess," he said, earnestly. "I live in the old house over there. My father won't let me go anywhere and—you—you're the first little girl I've ever talked to."

The Vision shut her lips tight and shook her finger severely at him.

"Billy Williams," she said, slowly, "it's naughty to tell lies."

"I'm not lying! It's true!"

"Cross your heart and hope to die?" she pursued, solemnly.

THE VAGABOND

"What do you mean?" he asked.

"Billy Williams," she replied, with puckering brow, "I guess the stork kept you in his pocket by mistake till you was 'most growed up and just borned you this morning."

Childhood, having explained a mystery in childhood's way—even as the miracles of peoples were made—proceeded to enlighten ignorance by taking the boy's hands in hers and crossing them over his breast.

"Cross my heart and hope to die I'm telling the truth," he repeated. "And I've never talked to a little boy, either."

After this test and having her theory of the absent-mindedness of the stork in view, she was quite prepared for anything.

He longed to do something to demonstrate that he was not as insignificant as his ignorance made him seem. A butterfly which lighted near-by became his opportunity.

"I'll catch it for you!" he cried.

By the bank of the creek and in the fields he gave chase, never heeding others that crossed his path, but following the original one with singleness of purpose until he had imprisoned it. With heads together they knelt, slowly opening the cage he had made of his cap until a struggling wing appeared. She touched it; silver powder glistened on the robber thumb.

"Poor little butterfly! Let it go!" she said; for only the sex that conserves and sits at home has an inborn hatred of killing and destruction.

He obeyed with the faith of a disciple. She clapped her hands delightedly.

THE VAGABOND

"I'll catch it again!" he cried; and he who had been so long hidden in the stork's pocket would have run until he fell from exhaustion for the reward of her smile.

"No, no, please," she said. "All the boys at the Post have promised—Billy Williams, cross your heart and hope to die you'll never rob a bird's nest. It's very naughty."

The disciple fervently took the oath.

"Thank you, Billy," she said, with a little courtesy.

Then it was that a man of eight-and-twenty appeared, a fishing-rod on his arm and his face triumphant over the catch that had made him slightly forgetful of his daughter's presence.

"Company, eh?" he said, cheerily.

Young William drew a little to one side. His guiltiness did not prevent him from observing this other father from head to toe. Tim Booker stood as erect, he thought, but the stranger's figure seemed to be knitted into his clothes.

"Yes," she said, speaking for her companion, "this is Billy Williams, and he's just the funniest little boy you ever did see, daddy."

"Well, Billy," daddy observed, stating a fact rather than asking a question, "how is that for a trout?"

He flung open his basket, while the sun played on gold and silver scales and speckles, and then as quickly he dropped the lid again and reached down and took his daughter's hand in his.

"Good-by, Billy Williams," the Vision called back over her shoulder. "Be sure you don't rob birds'

THE VAGABOND

nests, and hurry home to your dinner so you won't be scolded."

He stood quite still for some time after she had gone. She had been wonderful, very, very wonderful, indeed. And the man, too. He seemed to exhale something of the outside world which the boy was one day to explore, as he travelled and travelled to make up for his imprisonment.

"I let her order me about just as she pleases," he thought. "I'd never let any boy do that—never! I'd—I'd fight him first."

He had changed his ideas of his mountain somewhat. Now he wanted it to be steeper than the one in the wood-cut—a mountain all warty with overhanging bowlders—so that he could make a brave show in climbing it as she watched him. Slowly he walked back to the men in the fields, and to his friend he said, most seriously:

"Tim, please call me Billy after this. That's the nickname for William, isn't it?"

"When it ain't Bill; mostly it's Bill. Well, Billy it is, bub. What put that into your head?"

But Billy was not going to impart a hint of his new secret to any living soul; so he answered the question by asking one about the old, familiar one, which of late he had shared with his great friend.

"How much bigger ought I to be, Tim, before I can run away and be sure not to be caught?"

Tim leaned back and let a guffaw break in healthy resonance skyward. Then he regarded Billy with a measuring and pronounced squint.

"Six inches," he concluded, decisively. "And you don't want to start till the apples are ripe. If

THE VAGABOND

you start when they're green, that'll ruin your chances."

"Wouldn't five inches do—f-i-v-e?" Five seemed such a lot.

"No, sir. I've set you the limit."

"Six it is, Tim. I'd rather make it seven and be sure not to be caught. I just want to keep right on growing and never, never"—something caught in his throat and then by contagion in Tim's throat, too.

Before the day was done he had drawn a mark even with the top of his head on the door-casing and six inches above it another. When he told Tim of this, Tim was sorry for his remark.

"I meant Injun inches. They're twice as long. Six Injun inches is a foot."

But the boy caught Tim's eye in a twinkle. Tim realized that it was too late to draw back and found himself a bounden party to the enterprise. Thereafter, Billy had only to look at the marks on the door-casing when he chafed under his burden to be inspired to meek and proper conduct. He began systematically to read everything about mountains offered by the book-littered room that served as a library. Some traveller's tale about the wealth of the Urals enlarged his ambition. He must find a mine in his mountain.

She would wait for him under the trees at the foot of the great ascent and he would bring her a lapful of gold and precious stones just for the pleasure of seeing her smile and watching the mole dipping in and out of the dimple in her chin; all this when he did not even know her name and only that she lived at an army post. Such imageries in an eerie boy,

THE VAGABOND

bound to be happy though in a prison, would not be worth our mention had not his determination and the ardor of his loneliness and his adherence to first impressions made him steadfast. His friendship for Tim was for all time and all moods. His fancy for the girl was not a passing one. Hence this story.

II

FOUR OF THE SIX INCHES

Billy found, as hermits have before him, that the earth is never quiet. It can chatter as well as thunder; also listen to a boy's heart-beats. In winter, the stillness of some days spoke to him of the solemn grandeur of his mountain; the wind through the trees on others, of the precipices and jagged inclines and all obstacles that gave its ascent fascination. In summer, the humming of insects, the softer concert of buds bursting and leaves unfolding, the gentler side of Nature, spoke to him of that Vision by the pool. He never disturbed the swallows' nest which was lodged under the eaves near his window; yet he ruthlessly caught butterflies which, in fancy, he laid at her feet and then sent fluttering away at her royal command.

May had come once more and he had gained four of the six inches when he undertook a practice climb. He slipped out of the window of his room upon the roof of the porch and thence into one of the elm-trees. From the top he hoped to see the village. With one hand against the trunk to steady himself, he looked up, selecting each crotch which was to be a step of his ladder.

"My! This is nothing at all," he said, "nothing at all beside a mountain and precipices!"

As his gaze swept downward through an opening

THE VAGABOND

in the foliage, he caught a glimpse of an immense butterfly. Releasing his grasp of the limb, he clapped his hands at the joy of getting such a beauty for the girl, lost his balance and fell. (This is important as the first of such tragedies.) He remembered no more until the pain came and he opened his eyes.

"The leg's broken! It's broken! I thought so!" said his father, as he felt of it. "I'll take you to the doctor. Yes, I'll take you to the doctor. No woman around, either."

The voice was high, complaining, angry. After all, his method of rearing had not saved his son from accidents which befall other boys. With Billy in his arms, he started toward the gate, a walk of three miles before him. There he stood irresolute for a minute, then bore his burden back to the house and to his own room, where he laid it on the bed as abstractedly as if it were his coat. The jolt forced a groan from unwilling lips.

"Mrs. Rawkins hasn't been here this morning?" the father asked.

The question was enough to have convinced the neighbors who thought William Williams, Sr., queer that he was something more; a conviction that would have been formed long before if he had meddled in anybody's else affairs or some relative had wanted his property.

"No, oh, no! It hurts—how it hurts!" was the reply.

"Of course it does. I told you it would. I've been warning you ever since you were born that it would. Don't you suppose I know? It runs that way. Water doesn't run back up hill after it has run down. Don't

THE VAGABOND

you suppose I know? Mrs. Rawkins hasn't been here, either. It's strange. The doctor—he's a *man*! I'll go for the doctor."

For the first time in many years the recluse broke out of a walk. He ran half way to Rawkins's house before he stopped.

"I could set it myself," he said. "It's all in my books of medicine. But——"

But to put all or anything that he had learned into sustained, decisive action was beyond his capacity. He uttered an oath, which might have been directed at either the doctor, the boy, or the accident, and strode on.

Meanwhile, Billy's spirit had risen above mere bodily suffering. He sat bolt upright, splintered bone pricking flesh. If he could never walk again he might not climb his mountain! He might not run away! It was the hope of freedom that had made him joyous under tyranny. To hobble as he had seen lame horses! To lie through a lifetime that should be one long, rainy day, watching his father pace up and down the room! Never to explore the world! Never to know the elation of buffeting its hazards! Never to see the army post with the sentry pacing up and down between the two pillars in front of the entrance! Never to see the girl! Never to draw pictures of the strange places and faces he should see! Flesh quivering with shock, mind quivering with suspense, he drew himself toward the edge of the bed to learn his fate. Though it did hurt so much, perhaps he could still walk. He touched the well leg to the floor; he tried to steady the broken one; it flopped out of his control with an overpowering knife-thrust of pain.

THE VAGABOND

Again he was back on the bed; again that saturnine face with the scattered beard, the hollow cheek-bones, the big nose and the retreating chin, was over him. As the lids were raised, the father seized the boy in his arms, kissed him two or three times with mad, rough press; then sprang into the adjoining room, seated himself facing the bed, and stared at the flesh of his flesh as if it were an invader.

"I forgot," he said, his passion congealing into cynicism. "That was almost the same as kissing *her*."

It was Tim Booker who had galloped to the village, with his heart in his errand. His broad shoulders squared, he led the way into the house with an air of authority which was ever his own.

"Here's Doc Thomson! He's going to fix you up all right! Why, the doc once set sixteen bones in a boy and that boy was smart as a cricket in two weeks," he said, as he laid his big hand on Billy's head; and Billy tried to smile at the twinkle in Tim's eye.

The father glowered; then turned wheedlingly to the doctor.

"There won't be room for more than two at the operation, will there?" he asked.

Tim slowly turned his eyes and flashed them on the objector.

"I'm going to stick right here, Mr. Williams," he said.

"Yes, it's better," the doctor added, when he saw how Billy's face lighted at Tim's words.

The doctor's kindness was deeper than professional smirks. Hard riding for small fees had made his life, as the lines of his smooth-shaven face showed,

THE VAGABOND

an expression of his interest in the well-being of his little world.

"Yes, yes, it hurts a bit," he said, as he made the examination. "When we put it back it'll hurt a good deal more; so we'll see how much of a soldier you are. Mr. Booker, now if you'll just take hold of it there and keep the ankle steady."

"Let father do it!" Billy pleaded. "I want Tim here." He thrust his hand into the big palm of his friend. "If you'll let me have Tim I won't whimper."

"Yes, yes, certainly," said the doctor, softly. "Just hold the ankle steady now, Mr. Williams."

The broken ends gritted, the bruised flesh quivered, and the boy ground his teeth and drove his nails into Tim's hands. As the doctor put the splints on and began his directions for the care of the patient, Billy interrupted him with a question that was a sobbing cry.

"Tell me true, true! Cross your heart and hope to die"—that same oath that the Vision had administered to him—"cross your heart and hope to die, tell me honest—will I ever be well enough to walk, well enough to climb—a—mountain?"

He grasped Tim's hands tightly with both of his to help him bear the answer.

"Yes, you can climb anything Mr. Booker can." (The doctor always put in the Mister. Desiring respect, he showed it to others.)

"I can! I can! Tim, I can!"

His face was aflame. The mountain was his to climb; the world was his to explore. He could run away! He should see the girl!

"And—will I stop growing? Only two inches

THE VAGABOND

more—just two before I'll be big enough to run away!" In his excitement he had told his secret, and to his disadvantage, as his father's face showed.

"No. You ought to be pretty near as big as Mr. Booker," the doctor said.

Billy fainted for joy, and both the doctor and Tim were wiping their eyes when he revived. After they had gone, William, Sr., bent over his son, saying, almost unctuously:

"So you are going to run away, are you?"

There was no reply.

"I'll take care of that," William, Sr., added.

William, Jr., looked up at his father and, pained as he was, asked, weakly:

"If I don't run away, what are you going to do with me when I get to be a man?"

"Teach you! Teach you and see you don't draw fool pictures. You can read enough of the wickedness of the world. Learn, learn; that is the only thing. You can't learn much, even if you live to be a hundred. I'll see you dead before I'll see you run away."

Still William, Jr., made no reply. He only looked up steadily into his father's eyes and smiled. He had ever the trick of meeting the crises of his life in this way—by silence and a saving humor. That smile was indescribable, suggesting a wisdom as mature as its maker's experience of life was immature. It was tantalizing in its confidence and determination.

His optimism in face of the threat made convalescence speedy. When, in the late summer, tragedy precipitated him into new surroundings, one leg was as good as the other.

III

AND FOUR PROVE ENOUGH

Oh, you foolish adults with work-stiffened imaginations! Between trips to the house of death, Mrs. Rawkins warned the "poor dear" not to cry, for his pa had only gone to sleep. In truth, Billy had not shed a tear, a fever of wonder, awe, and agony having dried the ducts. With his knees on the rag-carpet cushion of a cane chair, he watched the coroner's jury congregate, one by one, proceed in a body to their duties, and one by one depart.

Then came the undertaker from Newland Centre and the inquiring neighbors, with "do tells." Half hidden behind the curtains he heard their greetings and speculations. They "wondered" what would become of the boy; they had "hearn tell" that Williams had "perty much" run through everything he had, and what he hadn't—a witticism this, in a knowing whisper—Jim Rawkins had got; they "guessed" that the outlook for the "little shaver" was "perty bad" and he'd have to be "bound out" to somebody for his "keep." That is, "onless" Judge John Williams, of the neighboring county, should take a hand. But the Judge had never had any association with his brother. A "curyus" man, said a Whig. There politics was interjected.

"Curys!" exclaimed a Democrat, in sarcasm. "D'ye ever hear him speak? He wiped out twenty-

THE VAGABOND

six hundred Whig majority in Belmore, that's what he did. He's the youngest jedge Belmore ever had. Curyus! He's jest curyus 'nough to be Governor of this State some day."

Even while they discussed this rising statesman, a mud-bespattered buggy from the Newland Centre livery-stable drove up.

"That's a good mare you've got, Ed," said the passenger, as he alighted, as if he had known the driver all his life instead of two hours.

"How're ye, Jedge?" said his defender, his waist receding and his chest swelling. "Heerd ye talk once over to Plaronville."

"Well; and how's that boy of yours—the little fellow that was with you when the mayor introduced you?" For the Judge had the memory and the art which make votes.

Actually not more than thirty-two or three, his manner and dress, even in those stiff days, made him seem forty, with the experience of fifty. Of average height, he was already a little inclined to stoutness. The style of his stock and collar, as well as his coat and high hat, were well out of date. One might have said, at first glance, that he had grown up in the company of old people who had taught him to make his life a protest against changing fashions. If you looked at him more closely when he spoke, you saw that his garb was only the eccentricity or the lapse of a broad character. "The Jedge don't care nothin' 'bout clothin' his outside," said Belmore County Democracy. "He's too busy clothin' his insides with larnin'." A mobile face and deep-set eyes set off a mouth which had the droop of the natural orator's.

THE VAGABOND

It was a bold Whig who ventured the remark that the Judge was something of a stranger in these "parts." The bold Whig meant to be sarcastic, though it did not occur to the Judge that he did.

"Yes, it's twenty years since I was here. The old place has changed a little," he added, sadly, as he looked up at the house on the hill.

How he had come to leave it was a neighborhood tale. Petty bullying had driven him to fight his elder brother William and he had thrashed William. His father had thrashed him in turn and he had run away, without being followed or sought.

Presently he asked for his nephew and was led into the sitting-room where Billy from his perch on the rag-carpet cushion had seen and overheard everything.

"I'm your uncle, my boy," he said, somewhat awkwardly.

Billy was suspicious of him. He looked too solid, too reposeful, for a runaway's taste.

"How do you do?" he said, slowly and distantly.

The uncle studied his features steadily for a moment, as if weighing the good family traits against the bad, and unconsciously his manner was that of the bench. Then he took Billy's chin in his hand and coddled it as one does a precious token, while Billy continued to stare at him and resented the familiarity. Unused to boys and having the orator's heart and the orator's habit, he made a speech about the inevitable which sounded well enough to adult ears but made his youthful hearer fear him as a new enemy. Later, when Billy saw the Judge and Jim Rawkins leaving the yard together, he was drawn to a plan

THE VAGABOND

which put action before inches. The decision suddenly and irrevocably made, he looked around stealthily, as if he feared that someone might have overheard his very thoughts.

He shared Tim's bed in a musty chamber upstairs. On the previous night, exhaustion and a sustaining presence had sent him to sleep quickly. Not so this time, though his arm was around the neck of his friend and comforter as before. When steady breathing signified that Tim was in dreamland, the shamming eyelids were raised. Curiosity, the fascination of the terrible event, an inexplicable desire to see his father again, drew him toward his home. He tiptoed to the window and listened: Silence within, the crickets singing without.

It was only a minute's work for bare feet and nimble toes and hands to drop to the ground and reach the road. At that point of vantage he took a long breath of boyish exultation, which was stopped short when he saw that a light was burning in the big house on the hill. Had his father come to life again? With his imagination surging, bravely urging his legs forward, on he went, crouching in the deep shadows that the rail fence cast under a waning moon's rays. He was unconscious of the gashes cut in bare soles by sharp stones and the thorns of stems of the wild raspberry bushes that clung to the rails for support. In which room was the light? Once at the gate, he had no doubt that it was in the parlor, which had always been closed. Suppose his father were alive and lurking him on with a lamp to kill him!

His stock of observation, large from lack of human association, assured him that it was easier to see into

THE VAGABOND

the room than out of it. How like his father, this folly of not putting the lamp outside where all the advantage would be with the tenant! He crept in the shadows and then on all fours under the window, where he held his breath and listened. Still no sound save the crickets. He flattened his hands against the clapboards, resting on tiptoes, and inch by inch raised his head until he could see within.

In the centre of the room was a long black box. On its tapering end stood a lamp which threw its glare fairly into the faces of the watchers. The work had been hard in the field that day, and Nature had asserted itself over the presence of death. One was an elderly man, who had slipped down in his chair; the other was a young man, whose head wobbled with his breaths which caught in his windpipe. As if in keeping with the scene, Billy found the outer door ajar. He listened; stepped inside and listened again. He heard nothing except the pounding of his own heart. It seemed to him to be rocking the whole house. Still it kept on, and still no one was stirred by the sound of it.

He crept to the parlor and peeked through the crack between the jamb and the open door, to find the sleepers as unconscious as the dead. The lamp on the foot of the coffin threw uncanny shadows over the haircloth furniture, the melodeon against the wall, and the cob-web-laden portraits of the builder of the house and the builder's wife. What a price in sweat those lean features had paid for the most expensively furnished "best room" for miles around, with what a result! They had scarcely set foot into luxury which was for the son's sake, which the son had sealed up to decay.

THE VAGABOND

One side of the lamp-chimney was smoked, the other gray with grease and dirt. At its base was an accumulation of dead flies.

At first, whenever the young man's head nodded, Billy dodged. At length he became so confident that he imagined himself making passes before the faces of the sleepers without awakening them. He stepped to the side of the coffin. Ascertaining by gentle pressure that the lid would slide, he slowly pushed it back till he saw the face of his father. William Williams, Sr., had done nothing in life with such precision as the firing of the shot that ended it. A tiny hole in either temple, exactly in line, was plugged with cotton. The lamplight made two deep, oblong shadows of the eye-pits; the chin seemed to have fallen farther away from the big nose; the scraggly beard had been indifferently trimmed.

Billy forgot to observe the watchers. His eyes dwelt on the visage before them until they were blinded by the scene of the day before; until in imagination he dodged again to escape his father's first bullet and saw him fall with the second report. He heard or thought he heard a ghostly creaking in another part of the house. Not waiting to close the lid, he now fled in panic from the room as if a phantom were pursuing him. When he reached the road he stopped abruptly. Retreat was obnoxious to his whole nature. The light still gleamed from the window and the crickets still chirped. An impulse sent him dodging back in the shadows to the window. The coffin was still open; the watchers were still sleeping.

"I'll have a good look at a thing before I get scared about it again," he whispered.

THE VAGABOND

His sight of that mockery, his home, was satisfied forever. He sped on to the Rawkins house, climbed in at the window, and discreetly awakened his friend by tugging at his hair. Tim sat bolt upright in bed and rubbed his eyes, while he listened in amazement.

"I can't help the inches, Tim," Billy gasped at last. "I'd die if I went to the funeral. I can't wait any longer. I'm going to-night."

Tim drew him close to his breast and shook him with a big bear's affection for its cub. This boy's conceits had kept this man of fancies in Rawkins's employ.

"Go ahead. That inch and a half won't count if you mind your p's and q's," he whispered.

"Tim!" Billy burrowed at Tim joyfully with a clinched fist.

Tim had run away from home himself, away from a farmer of those close-living, hard-praying New England days—may Heaven bless their virtues and also damn their faults!—to whom he had been bound out for his "keep." So he had advice to give.

"Look every man in the eye and nobody will try to put a check-rein on you. But don't you think that every man's eyes will twinkle when he lies. I've got a patent right on that myself. And the deeper you're in trouble, the sharper you look to your smile. With your head up and that smile in working order, you'll do, you'll do! St—t, keep still!"

Tim took a key out of his trousers which hung on the bedpost. He tiptoed to a corner, fumbled awhile, opened a box, and returned to put something that gleamed yellow in the moonlight and twenty cents in change—all he had—into the boy's hand.

THE VAGABOND

"It's a twenty-dollar gold piece. It'll buy you things to eat till you put forty or fifty miles behind you. I'd go with you, only they'd suspect I'd put you up to the game." He drew Billy closer to him. It seemed as if Billy was bone of his bone and blood of his blood. "My boy, wherever you are, whatever your luck, you've got a friend in Tim Booker you can count on. When you get away and things are quieted down, write me."

"Yes, Tim; why, of course. You're the only friend I've got and I love you."

"When you make up your mind to run, run. If you feel like snivellin', swallow hard and then try to whistle. Most boys by the time they've gone five miles can't think of anything but their sore feet and troubles; so they go sneakin' back. If you don't, when I get that letter I'll run away and catch up with you and we'll try our luck together."

"Oh, Tim, will you?"

"I've given my word."

"Will you go climb mountains with me? And will we be real true partners forever, Tim—'cause I love you."

"Yes."

He pressed Billy and kissed him. "Good-night," he added, and rolled over with his back to the boy.

"Good-night, Tim."

"Nig-h-ht," drawled a voice smothered in a pillow.

"I'll write. I'll wait for you, Tim."

No answer.

"I'm going, Tim."

"I'm asleep," drawled the truthful fabricator. "Af-

THE VAGABOND

ter pitching hay all day a man can't be expected to know what's going on at one o'clock in the morning."

With his shoes and stockings in hand and a final good-by, which Tim pretended not to hear, Billy went out into the world.

IV.

IF YOU HOLD YOUR HEAD HIGH

Now he had passed from under the black cloud into the blue; now the sunlight of his nature might play upon all the adventures that his heart might favor and his mind conceive.

Ordinary boyish discretion overshadowed by his sense of relief, he had taken to the road in direct line of flight. It was gray dawn when he entered the village. He heard blinds flung open with creak and slam, but saw no one in the street, and pursued his way with a glance of curiosity at the one-story building with "Post-Office and General Store" in faded letters over the door, which had been the most familiar and nearest thing of the outer world in the every-day talk of Tim and the Rawkins family. Fifteen of the twenty cents in change went promptly for crackers and cheese at Newland Centre, twelve miles from home and twenty miles from Plaronville, the metropolis of the county of Belmore, which was the terminus of a railroad and a great place, generally speaking, in A.D. 1849.

He spent that night on a stack of new-mown hay in the sweet sleep of vagabondage, awakening at sun-up to find his feet too sore and swollen for his shoes. He smiled at Tim's warning, even while he looked at the gashes of the raspberry thorns. Wounds in a good cause may be sweet; a welted scar a petted souvenir.

THE VAGABOND

His buoyant nature was not of the kind that turns back; rather of the kind that spits itself on the bayonet. He went picking his way over the stubble to the nearest pasture, whistling as one who is hastening through a stint to a long holiday.

Thus he descended upon a near-by town just as the hotel-keeper was opening his doors. The odor of frying bacon and eggs came from the kitchen. It was easy to conclude that a breakfast offered a most dignified excuse for changing his twenty-dollar gold piece. As he approached, the landlord fastened a notice on a space on the clapboards peppered with rusty tack-holes beside those of a town meeting, a sheriff's sale, and a runaway slave, and passed in.

Boyish curiosity must read:

"Fifty Dollars Reward," ran the letters before Billy's amazed eyes. "Ran away from the Williams Homestead, Rockville, Newland Co., night of August 11th, William Williams. Supposed to have gone in the direction of Plaronville. A boy ten years old, large for his age, carries his head high, sandy-haired, blue-eyed, much freckled, short nose and strong chin. Wore a gingham shirt buttoned into linsey-woolsey pants about the height of his ankles. Fifty dollars will be paid for his return or detention. Address Judge John Williams, Belmore, or James Rawkins, Newland Centre. P. S. William need have no fears. He will have a good home."

So the Judge and Jim had joined hands against him! "A good home!" He had about as much use for that, Billy thought, with mountains to climb and the world to explore, as a mermaid for shoes. How could it be a good home with the pompous, oratorical man

THE VAGABOND

in the stock or Jim Rawkins in sight? It would take a livelier bait than that to catch him.

When he had read the notice about himself through twice, he read the others about Bingo, late of Virginia, the fallen cattle trader, and the town meeting confusedly, while, the edge of his hunger flattened by anxiety, he determined upon his course of flight. In the manner of John Smith's son going to the post-office after the weekly paper, he turned and walked away. He understood that if anybody was watching him he would only excite suspicion by looking back; for he had seen his own freckled face in the mirror often enough to know how well he answered to the description.

He promptly struck into the fields, keeping the main road to Plaronville in sight. After some minutes he noticed a man in a buggy driving rapidly. Suddenly this fellow stopped; then sent his horse forward at a trot, disappearing over a knoll. Billy grasped his pursuer's plan. His first impulse was to run; his second, quickly following or else there had been none, involved his first stroke of cunning. He walked on as if he were still John Smith's son going after the weekly paper. The pursuer, having left his vehicle and doubled on his course, met him just at the top of the knoll.

"Guess you're perty hungry by this time, Billy Williams," he said, a little pompously. "I've come to take you home."

With that fifty dollars as good as in his pocket, the town loafer (who had "borrerred a hoss jest to run down the road a piece") grinned at the weaknesses of human nature.

THE VAGABOND

"Perty!" The boy with his inborn hatred of pomposity had a sense of mimicking the dialect, try hard as he would to play the lambkin's part. "Have I got to walk?" He held up a bare sole. "My feet's *perty* sore."

"No, sir! No boy's got to walk that goes with Abe Parkins. We'll have a nice breakfus' at the hotel together."

(What a story of how Abe "managed it" as he "sets 'em up" after Billy is packed off for Newland Centre, value received!)

"Thank you. I'm hungry as a bear," said that wicked runaway.

"Yeh-op! I know boys; all boys has got stummicks, ain't they? And they finds it out about breakfus'-time, don't they? Ho, ho, ho!" observed the sage.

Abe's borrowed steed was tied to a fence. Not yet recovered from his haste to reach the crest of the hill, he was only too glad to avail himself of the boy's offer to run ahead and unhitch. Billy untied the strap leisurely. The instant it was loose he turned into a human cat that sprang into the buggy and slapped the horse's flanks. When he was far down the road he could not resist the joy of turning in his seat and swinging his battered straw hat in farewell to the pudgy, demonstrative figure in the distance.

Simple cunning is stronger in the boy than in the man, who lacks confidence to make it successful. Long latent in Billy, it now burned brightly. Every mile was one nearer Plaronville. He halted before the horse was worsted, because he saw his second line of defence. Certain that no one was in sight, he ran

THE VAGABOND

twenty yards into a field and dropped his shoes and stockings. It was in August, you see. Ensconced in a dry culvert which carried the waters of a brook in spring, Billy overheard the arrival of Abe Parkins, come by courtesy of a farmer's wagon; also Abe's expression of joy and his deductions therefrom when his gaze lighted on the shoes and stockings; and, finally, he peeked out to see Abe fortify himself with something from a bottle and start across the fields on the trail.

The sport of the thing had chilled the memory of the smell of eggs at the hotel. However, it did not take the place of dinner and supper. As the hours wore on, his throat seemed as dry as the culvert; his stomach much larger. Inactivity and hunger made his imagination race. He divined all kinds of obstacles to his future progress and overcame them after his own fashion. Ere he crept out at night he had become an accomplished strategist. His plan of campaign was unchanged: To satisfy his hunger, reach the city, then the army post, then the mountains.

He had travelled farther than he thought in Abe Parkins's "borrerred" buggy. His scheme for milking cows in the pastures for his dinner passed into thin air when, from the first hill that he ascended, he saw the twinkling lights of the city set in a basin of darkness. With a twenty-dollar gold piece in his pocket, why shouldn't he dine in town? Who cared for one small boy in such a big place? He would order ham and eggs at that restaurant with the thousand candles that played a great part in Tim's fantastic description of urban life. By the light of the street-lamps he could see the houses set in so many yards in the

THE VAGABOND

suburbs. They seemed wofully cramped to him. Why should anyone want to live in a box when there were mountains to be climbed? Why should one walk back and forth on a single narrow street when his legs would carry him across a continent? He stopped in the shadow at a corner, wondering whether it was wise to ask the way of two men whom he recognized as policemen. He could almost have touched the coat-tail of one.

"Fifty dollars ain't to be had every day," this one was saying. "I'll nab every freckle-faced boy I see on spec."

Before the other had drawled his rejoinder Billy was gone. He flew down the first alley until he came to a dry-goods box lying against the back of a store. A glance showed that no one was following. There he waited until he saw the lights of the residences disappear one by one and no longer heard footsteps on the wooden sidewalk.

Excitement cannot long take the place of food for any youngster. He was hungry and faint as he made his way abroad. A few people still loitered in the main street. With the spring of a leap for liberty in his limbs, he walked on, once more John Smith's son going after the weekly paper. Directly, his eye brightened and his nostrils sniffed coffee. The one restaurateur who could remain up until the pool-rooms closed was still out with his wagon. Oh, the smell of that coffee! But it was not wise, the strategist reasoned, to tarry long enough in such a public place to drink anything. Some pieces of bread with meat between them marked "5 cents"—he had never seen the like before—struck him as an ideal supper

THE VAGABOND

for a boy in a hurry. He picked up four in a matter-of-fact way and offered his twenty-dollar gold piece in payment. The man scanned him closely.

"What's a boy your size doin' with all that gold?" he asked. (Yes, gingham shirt, head held high, and freckled face.)

"That's my business. If you're too poor to change it I'll take *one*."

He laid the long-squeezed five-cent piece on a sandwich and walked on, slipping into the first dark corner, the calls of his stomach supreme, to eat his purchase in peace. As he emerged, a hand was laid on his shoulder. His face was fairly in the light of a street-lamp as he looked up to his captor, who grinned with satisfaction.

"Billy Williams, you've come a good piece from Newland Centre," he said. "I'm going to take you home."

"Are you quite sure?" thought Billy; while he said, "All right," cheerfully and in great docility let the policeman take his hand to lead him across the railroad track and river to the police-station. He only wished that his captor had a horse and buggy. But strategists must deal with situations as they arise. He soon recovered his wits and became gay, most demonstratively so. As they passed onto the bridge he cried:

"Hooray! And I'll ride in the train and sleep in my own bed! Hooray!"

He threw his hat in the air. It fell some feet in front of the pair.

"Well, you're a lively one!" thought the policeman, as he watched him run ahead.

THE VAGABOND

Billy picked up the hat and something else which he had in mind. Lightning broke out of a clear sky for the captor. The impact of a hurled stone against the pit of his stomach made him blind and breathless. Billy ran past him to the railroad yard and darkness, trusting now entirely to flight. A freight train was just creaking out of the yard. It was going in his direction—that of the army post. The coupling of the rear car seemed to thrust itself out for his purpose. He scrambled onto it, straddled it, and braced himself with his hands between his legs.

Only boys and men who think that girls are worth winning and mountains worth climbing are equal to such efforts. Thus he rode for twenty long miles, until at break of day the train slowed up to cut out a car at a station. So stiff that he could scarcely crawl at first, he limped across the fields to a gully, where he lay down and fell asleep.

It was past noon when he awoke, with his legs sore and stiff and raw in places and shooting pains from head to foot. As one fitful outburst of flame only makes a room more cheerless on a winter's night, so that one sandwich had left only a greater vacancy in his stomach. By this time, he thought, he must have passed out of touch with the notices of runaway boys. He would go to the station and try to change that gold piece. Then it occurred to him that he ought to look around, for he had come so far that there might be mountains in sight. Instead, he saw something that gave him equal delight. There, not five hundred yards away, were the long, two-storied building for the men, the row of officers' houses, the parade ground and the stone pillars at the entrance, with a man in

THE VAGABOND

uniform with rifle thrown over his shoulder walking up and down. Everything else in abeyance, he limped forward to inquire for the girl. He was going straight to the pacing sentry when some papers on a board fastened to one of the posts made him approach that instead.

It was printed this time!

Out of the corner of his eye he saw that the soldier had not seen him. He started again to play the part of John Smith's son going for the weekly paper. But retreat was retreat from the girl. He must see her. There must be other freckle-faced boys in the world. ("Have a good look at a thing before you get scared about it," he repeated to himself.) A confident manner might further the conviction that he was generic rather than specific. With his head thrown back and both hands in his pockets, appearing so much the opposite to crestfallen as logically to excite suspicion, he stepped up to the sentry as that automaton wheeled on his beat.

"Hello!" he said.

"Well, hello yourself, sonny. What's doing in your county?" said the sentry.

He did not associate the freckled face with the notice because he had not looked at the front side of the stone pillar since he began his "go" ten minutes before.

"Is—is there a little girl here?"—how he wished that he knew her name!—"a little girl with a mole on her chin?"

The sentry was not a man of great comprehension or even with a sense of humor, else he would have found at least a laugh in the situation.

"Well, sonny, you're 'way behind the times. She

THE VAGABOND

went out almost to the Rocky Mountains a year ago;" and with that he went on pacing.

Billy tried to whistle, partially succeeding, as Tim had bidden him to do when in distress. His lip was quivering; the freckles were on an ashen background; but the head was still poised high and he smiled to give countenance to that whistle. The Rocky Mountains were two thousand—t-w-o t-h-o-u-s-a-n-d—miles away. He had meant to see them some day, of course. In the meantime, he had intended to practise on smaller mountains and grow. But the Rockies it should be. His legs could carry him to their mighty ascents, he was sure, if he held his head high and did not get scared at things before he had a good look at them. Besides, the notices could not follow him all that distance, and she would be near-by when he found his mine. His courage received fresh impetus; the ache went out of his limbs.

As he turned to pursue his way, he saw another man in uniform; an officer as erect as the sentry despite his age, smooth-shaven except for the little tufts of iron-gray hair in front of his ears (in the fashion set by General Scott). He looked at Billy sharply from out of the mass of dried, squinting wrinkles which a plainsman's life begets. Billy had never seen such eyes before as these steely gray ones. Their glance seemed to pass through him in merciless search of his every secret.

"Well, well!" he said. "Your face is freckled enough; gingham shirt and head up, too. Are you the boy mentioned in this notice? *Are you?*"

"Yes, sir," was all Billy could say, as he tried to smile and whistle.

V

AND SMILE AT OGRES

And where was the girl? She is to play as important a part in our story as the boy. For the good and sufficient reason that whatever concerns her concerns him, we make a digression in this chapter measurable by the difference in caste and the expanse of country that separated the pair. She had become the Miss General of another army post, enclosed in a high stockade that rose above the dead level of the prairie in the armed loneliness of a man-of-war at sea. Her father had gone to fight Indians (which was done in very truth in those days); he had gone to meet a gallant death which, whatever honor it brought to him, left an orphan whose future was made the subject of a council, the Colonel's wife acting as chairwoman. The disposition of each member of the majority was to adopt her. The minority, consisting of the chairwoman alone, was determined, forceful, and far-seeing.

"We poor army folks haven't much to offer," said she. "Think what *he* can do for her!"

"Suppose *he* should refuse!" put in a doubtful one, with the same accent on the threatening pronoun.

"*He* can't!" returned the Colonel's wife. "We sha'n't give him a chance. We'll simply send her on.

THE VAGABOND

When he sees her and he can't help himself, he'll give her her deserts for family pride's sake."

The opinion of the ranking lady prevailed. Soon after the Vagabond started on his journey westward, little Miss General started in the other direction in charge of an officer's wife who was returning East.

"You must smile when you meet your grandfather," were the ranking lady's last words, and the ranking lady was mighty and must be obeyed.

Between her periods of sobbing with her head in her companion's lap, she promised herself to be very brave, though there was no daddy any more to enthrone her with his epaulets as a seat, while that fateful letter to Mortimer Lanley, Esquire, travelled only two days ahead of her. Besides, she was old enough to understand the situation in its essentials, which alone interest us. Her father and her grandfather had quarrelled over the son's marriage to "that Yankee girl" who had died with the birth of her child.

When the letter was brought to her nearest of kin, he was in his study. An hour afterward, his body-servant, Marcus Aurelius, re-entering, found him sunk in his chair, the emptied sherry decanter overturned at his side and the sheet that bore the news still in his hand, which hung limp at his side. Marcus Aurelius whistled—but not until he had withdrawn.

When, finally, the master appeared, he said: "Set your old mistress's rooms to rights;" called for his horse and rode across the fields. Thus far and no further did he commit himself. Remorse for his stubbornness made him still feel himself to be the injured one. This girl was a Yankee, not his grandchild at all. Care for her he would, care for her he must, as

THE VAGABOND

a matter of decency. Some needy gentlewoman in Washington would doubtless welcome the task. Beyond that—a dozen times the next day he looked in at the room that his wife, his mother, and his grandmother had occupied, making with his own hand some change in keeping with his memory of other days when he was not alone. It was on one of these occasions that the image of the past, the horror of his son's loss, the thought of what might have been, which the preparations had aroused, made him cry out: "Remember, it is for your new mistress, your new mistress!" No sooner had he spoken than he regretted his outburst of sentiment and sent the open-mouthed, open-eyed servants scurrying, with a reminder that their only business was to look sharp. A Yankee's daughter in Volilla's place! A strange little girl enthroned in that old house! "She'll be more at home in a boarding-house!" he exclaimed.

Within an hour he was again in his study, rereading another letter which had arrived at the same time as the ranking lady's. This was written by the ranking officer. The Colonel commanding not only knew how to be brief, but he also understood a gouty, morose old man. "Need I say any more than that your son fell in a manner worthy of a Lanley?" He appended the laconic official report of the action. "The Captain's sabre," he added, "is being sent in the custody of his brave little daughter." No appeal, no Yankee pettifogging in that—only a statement of facts!

Mr. Lanley looked long at the precious document before he folded it and put it in his strong box. Then he returned to that room and began rearranging the furniture. Yes, he remembered perfectly that in the

THE VAGABOND

spring his wife always shifted her dressing-table to the far corner.

But on the morning that he set forth for Washington he felt as if he were going to repel an invasion.

"De mist'ess' room's all ready," Hannah, the nurse, told him.

"I may not bring her. I may take her to school at once," he replied.

What was he to do with a girl in that old house? Probably her blood would assert itself and she would grow up an Abolitionist. He had troubles enough with his gout and his debts and his loneliness as the last of his race without this fresh one. Still, he had dressed in his best for the journey. With strangely beating heart, his fingers playing with his watch-fob, he stood, after his long ride, a relentless critic on the station platform. What would she be like? He pictured her a freckled, scrawny little vixen, piping and pouting in a nasal twang. Good God! How should he act if she cried? If she doubled up her fists and struck and screamed, or fell down in a hysterical fit and kicked and bawled that she "wouldn't—she wouldn't, yeh-eh-eh!" He had made a mistake, no doubt (carefully as he had fortified himself against all contingencies), in not bringing the old nurse. Hannah, however, would take any child to her arms and never let it go. He was almost in fear of Hannah, the all-powerful relic of another century.

"Whatever I do, I sha'n't let that Yankee woman that's with her read me any lecture," he growled, as the train approached.

Keen, young eyes on the lookout for an ogre needed only a glance over the waiting people before the train

THE VAGABOND

stopped to recognize her fate in the tall, spare figure, with trousers strapped under the insteps, beaver hat, high stock, expansive shirt-bosom, and claw-hammer coat. He was as severe as, and even more sombre than, she had expected. Old generals, she knew, could unbend, for they were in bright uniforms; this figure in its quiet garb to her eyes gave no more promise of mobility than a column of stone. Her lip trembled; the tears were starting; the cry of "Daddy, daddy, do come back to your little girl!" was rising from her heart to utterance, when she remembered how she had promised the formidable ranking lady to be brave and arm herself with a smile; how, indeed, the ranking lady had said that to snivel in the ogre's presence was to be lost.

Breaking away from her companion as they stepped from the car, swiftly, desperately, lest her courage should desert her, she ran toward the forbidding arbiter of her future. On his part, he was conscious of a beautiful child bowing before him and of moist brown eyes, the pupils dilating in trepidation, looking into his.

"I've brought you papa's sabre," she pleaded. "You—you won't be very cruel—not just at first—'cause I'm so tired and mis'bul."

Stiff joints yielded uncomplainingly with his weight as he bent until his face was on a level with hers. The pressure of his lips to her soft cheek sent a tremor through him, inexplicable, strange, benumbing.

"Not cruel, not a bit cruel," he said, gently, abstractedly, as some impulse, a part of this new emotion in his heart, made him stroke the silky hair, whose touch made the tremor a flood of that mysterious in-

THE VAGABOND

toxication which he did not yet recognize as the joy of kinship.

"Thank you, grandpapa," she said, relieved, but not yet quite assured.

Her travelling companion now appeared to occupy Mr. Lanley's polite attention, while little Miss General recognized the presence of the most remarkable being of her experience, Marcus Aurelius. A fringe of hair as white as his teeth showed between the antique stove-pipe hat and the ebony of his face. Hat and the spike-tailed coat and flaming waistcoat with their big brass buttons were relics of his and his master's youthful days abroad, while he himself was the flower of a regime. There was something in the very sight of him to make a small girl glow with trustful confidence.

"Doan' yo' worry," he said, bowing profoundly. "He looks like er cloud dat's gwine t' sto'm monst'us hard, but de sun's des behind. I'll take yo' t' your keridge, mist'ess."

Mr. Lanley, overhearing, raised his eyebrows, making no objection. Marcus, as well as Hannah, was arbitrary.

The carriage was a part with master and servant, antique and self-respecting, roomy enough for a whole family. It was difficult to say which was the more wrinkled, the paint on the high box or the face of Josephus, the driver. However, Josephus's coat of varnish was more recent.

"There's so much of it and it's all very old," she said, when she was seated on the worn cushions.

"It's de Lanley keridge, an' yo' is mist'ess," said Marcus, as if that were the same as saying, "A heav-

THE VAGABOND

only chariot is yours and all the clouds your private highway."

"Aren't you going to ride in here, too?" she asked.

"No, kase my place is on de box. But doan' yo' worry. Yo's got de real Lanley blood. I kin see it frough de skin. We'll thaw ole Massa des as easy, yo' an' me—des as easy as slippin' on greased ice." And Marcus bowed and closed the door with a ceremonious slam.

After Mr. Lanley, in strictest formality, had paid his acknowledgments once more to the lady who had accompanied her, he acted in the uncertain manner of a hermit endeavoring to adapt himself to childhood's humor.

"Are you comfortable?" he asked.

"I've plenty of room, thank you," she replied.

"Perhaps you'd like something under your feet," he went on, suggestively.

"Thank you, if it's—it's proper for the mistress of Lanleyton."

There she had asserted her right, her sense of duty, her blood, and a spirit that lighted his eyes with a gleam of pride. Forthwith, he put the leather cushions on the box to a more chivalrous service; and the party, unmistakably Virginian to every passer-by, started over the uneven cobbles of Washington, a capital village rather than a capital city in that day, Mr. Lanley riding beside the carriage in silence till she spoke.

"What a fine horse you have, grandpapa!"

No compliment except on his wines could have been more telling.

"You like horses?" he asked.

THE VAGABOND

"Of course I like 'em. Daddy was in the cavalry."

The old man swallowed, his lips twitched, and he looked straight ahead without another word until they were well out into the country. Then he glanced at the carriage-window and studied her face. She would be a beautiful woman, no doubt, he admitted.

At noon they stopped under the shade of a tree near a spring. While the driver unhitched his horses and fed them, Marcus Aurelius proceeded with the knowing skill of an experienced hand to a function. First he spread a blanket for a carpet and set the cushions for seats; next a linen cloth with the luncheon, including a quart of Johannisberger for his master.

"Dere, sah, doan' yo' talk t' me 'bout yoah hotels!" he observed, surveying his finished task.

With the liquid sunshine of the Rhine on his palate, the sunshine of his beloved State suffusing the landscape, and that fair young face looking up into his, Mr. Lanley's humor further mellowed; more and more his mind was familiarized with the full reality of a new-born affection.

"Not so long ago," he said, "this was the only way of travelling in Virginia. Which do you like better, our old carriage or a railroad train?"

"The train is very, very exciting the first time, but I like the carriage better. It's more in-de-pen-dent. It's ours, isn't it?"

There she struck the Lanley key-note. Quizzically, as an old man will, he had watched for signs of Northern contamination.

"Ours," he repeated, "ours! Yes, my dear, it is *our* old carriage." He bent over and kissed her on

THE VAGABOND

the cheek. "Your name!" he exclaimed. "Why, I forgot to ask that!"

"Volilla Bulwer Lanley," she replied.

Volilla! It was his wife's name; an old family name. He cupped her small, brown chin in his old, wrinkled hand and kissed her on the lips.

"Volilla!" he repeated. "Volilla!"

"Mamma, so daddy said—I don't 'member her—when he said, you see, 'What shall we call our little girl'? why, mamma said, 'Call her after your mother'; 'cause then mamma thought maybe you, grandpapa, would forgive her and like me and think she wasn't so—so bad. And—oh, I oughtn't to have told you! You mustn't say anything against my mamma, 'cause I couldn't bear it. I love her."

"No, never," he managed to say, as he rubbed his brows with his finger pathetically and looked into space. His revery showed him, finally, as well as the cruel folly of the past, the hope of all the reparation that the future could make. "Forgive me," he said, pressing his cheek against hers.

He began his new career at once. While he talked of Virginia and Virginia ways and the plantation and plantation ways, Marcus Aurelius and Josephus, dismembering a fowl, watched furtively the descent of the contents of the wine-bottle. They knew what their master would say; the important thing was when he would say it. Ordinarily, he drank little more than a pint; but on a hot day there was no telling.

"Well, do you want to wet your rascally tongues?" (The usual formula.)

Giving wine to servants seemed very remarkable to this frugally trained Northern girl; the more so as

THE VAGABOND

it was accompanied by vituperation. Josephus, being nearest, received the bottle.

"See whar mah thumb is?" he observed, plausibly, to Marcus. "All b'low dat's yoahs."

With adept quickness, he threw back his head and guzzled all. To make amends for the outrage, the master gave Marcus Aurelius a cigar, which Marcus was to puff patronizingly into Josephus's face on the way home.

While the horses were being rehitched, Mr. Lanley told about his slaves—"two hundred and ten, I think there are, now. One is never quite certain, for a pickaninny may have been born during my absence." He helped her back into the carriage as gallantly as if she were a belle and he a beau of that day when civility, which now stalks abroad alone, had politeness for its handmaiden.

"Thank you, grandpapa. You did that very prettily," she twinkled.

"I could not have done it awkwardly for you, my dear," he said, and lifted his hat to her ladyship, who thought it the finest "playing house" she had ever known. It was not playing to him. He was actually twenty-one again.

Now and then he pointed out different objects along the road-side, his thoughts centred on a certain boundary-line.

"Here we are, my dear," he cried at last, with enthusiasm that was a stranger to his lips, "here our plantation begins—our three thousand acres!"

"Oh, goody!" she cried; and after some time: "Are we riding clear around the three—thousand—acres?"

"No, no, my dear. The house is quite in the cen-

THE VAGABOND

tre of the plantation. There, there!" He pointed with the eagerness of a boy. "There! you can see it!"

Carriage and rider halted. Through a grove, on the summit of a hill, in the afternoon sun blinked the Doric pillars of Lanleyton, and above them, as if sitting on the tree-tops, a white cupola. The master was not looking in that direction himself, but at Volilla's face, beaming with wonder; for it was a long time since he had enjoyed the great pleasure of giving pleasure to others. She drew a sigh and sat up a little straighter before she spoke.

"Am I to be the only lady in that big, big house, and of—of the three thousand acres?" she asked.

"Yes, my dear."

"It's a great 'sponsibility," she said. "I'll try—I'll try ever so hard, grandpapa."

Marcus Aurelius and Josephus paid no attention to the servants who came running from the house, to the hands from the quarters, or even to the pickaninies who turned handsprings as the carriage went up the drive with stately deliberation, its occupant as serenely dignified as if she were used to such ovations and to the hypercritical scrutiny of the mammies. Without any of the gouty "ohs" or "ahs" to which he was given, Mr. Lanley dismounted. With his own hand he opened the door of the carriage and assisted her ladyship to alight.

"Thank you, grandpapa," she said, with the same easy confidence of playing house. "I'm so glad to be home."

Seizing her in his arms and carrying her shoulder high, with the strength of his impulse and his great joy, he mounted the steps, and turning to that black

THE VAGABOND

shadow spattered with gleaming teeth and eyeballs, cried:

“My people, this is your new mistress! You are to obey her every word as you would mine.”

Clasped tightly in her hands was her father's sheathed sabre whose blade still had a battle edge. Her grandfather had only faint apprehension, and she had none, of the clouds which were already lowering on that proud old house, whose white pillars seemed as stable as the distant heights of the Blue Ridges.

VI

OR STIFF OLD DRILL SERGEANTS

Billy recognized in Captain Bob Herrick, U. S. A., a wholly different type of man from the fat policeman and Abe Parkins. The policeman had been an Abe Parkins in uniform. The Captain was an entirely new order of being. Cunning would no longer avail; and, besides, it had become hateful. Our runaway developed the courage of desperation and of his convictions. The smile faded and the whistle died on his lips. In a voice that trembled as an engine does, with force, he narrated his story—Ann, father, Latin, the mountain—all, except the girl. The prisoner who had broken no laws spoke; the prisoner at last free, bent on a definite object, sought only a fair field.

“You, sir, a big man, an old man,” he cried, “would you stop a boy who hasn’t harmed you? Would you, you, a big man, rob a boy of his liberty for fifty dollars—for *just* fifty dollars?”

His words came faster with his growing indignation; his head was thrown back defiantly; his blue eyes, unusually tranquil, in nowise belying the fire underneath, received the enemy’s shafts as the calm sea receives bolts of lightning. All the soldierly sentiment of Captain Herrick’s nature was aroused by such courage under fire.

THE VAGABOND

"By the Eternal!" he exclaimed, professional acumen triumphant, "I'd like to enlist you!"

"Will you stop me?" Billy repeated. "Will you, a big man, stop a boy—just for fifty dollars?"

"Stop you! Bob Herrick ain't been in the United States regular army for forty years without ever turning a red cent except his pay to start kidnapping now! Stop you! By the Eternal, I'll line up, dip the colors and salute you, you freckled little cuss!" Over that face, all fine-drawn lines of sternness, played now, in the mobile change of each one, a veritable witches' dance of amusement and good-humor. "Stop you! Lord Almighty, no!" He had passed into the full-worded habit of the mess-room where officers make amends for few-worded routine. "Not unless"—and there he sniggered high up in his nose, quizzically—"not unless you're hungry. How'd you like to come in and have a big piece of p-i-e?"

"A piece of pie so you can lock me in?" Billy asked.

The Captain's expression again became as firm as that of sheet-iron.

"Do I look like a man who would lie?" he demanded.

"No, sir. You would not lie—I'm sure you wouldn't; and I'd like that piece of pie very much if you could change a twenty-dollar gold piece for it."

"Come along, you vagabond!" (That nickname stuck.)

"Yes, sir," and Billy sprang to his side with the impulse of an appetite born of a brief but intense contemplation of pie.

"That's right. Spoken like a soldier. Always say

THE VAGABOND

sir. Conversation needs a handle as much as a skillet, and the boy that uses the handle won't get his fingers burnt."

The Captain led the way to his living-room, which was indubitably that of a man of action. On the shelf was an English translation of Cæsar's Commentaries, of Jomini, and a few other works equally unrelated to the arts of peace. On the walls were Indian bows, arrow-heads, and head-dresses, and, what was of more moment to the boy, an engraving of the City of Mexico with Popocatepetl bulking out of perspective in the background.

"Have you ever climbed that, sir?" Billy asked, forgetting all else.

"No. I went up a good piece. I don't undertake to say how high it is, but it's a regular rip-snorter of a mountain."

"Seventeen thousand feet, sir." Billy knew the height of all the big mountains of the world by heart.

"I suppose you'd just shin right up to the top, first off."

"I'd try hard, sir. Think what a lot you'd see—you'd *see*, sir!"

He continued to ask questions about Popocatepetl until a servant brought something more edible.

"You can't work your outsides unless you fill up your insides," said the Captain. "Set to, double quick!"

The Vagabond sat down in the august presence of big slices of cold chicken and beef, a half loaf of bread, a pot of jam, a piece of pie, and a pitcher of milk.

It is one of the rare privileges of old age to watch a boy eat. The Captain's palate tickled with every

THE VAGABOND

mouthful that ascended on the fast-plied fork; and this continued scrutiny increased his admiration for his guest, whose sore hands and gingerly manner of sitting on the edge of the chair left no doubt of the truth of the latest particulars of his tale.

"I was a runaway boy myself," said the Captain.

"You were!" cried Billy, rapturously. "Oh, I should like to hear all about it."

"Yes, sir. I ran away in the year 1800. That's a pretty long while ago, ain't it? I was bound out for my keep and I didn't like it nohow. I ran as fast as I could to the sea and got aboard a ship, a sailor for to be, as the saying goes. And what do you think I sailed? I sailed the pots and pans about the galley for a cross-eyed cook! Yes, sir, I seen a good deal of the world by sea and then I started out to see some of it by land. That's how I came to be carrying a musket in 1812."

"You fought in the war of 1812!" cried Billy. "You—you—didn't fight at Lundy's Lane, did you?" Unconsciously he had hit upon the Captain's favorite theme.

"Did I? Well, I guess I did, harder'n I ever fit before or expect to fight again. We fought the British there. It's Lundy's Lane that got me my commission—but not till fifteen years after, for I'm a pretty old man to be a Captain, I'll allow. Well, sir, I was carrying a musket for fifteen years before General Scott—Colonel Scott he was then—came along inspecting a Post out West and says: 'What! You still a sergeant'? Yes, sir, he remembered the youngster that picked up a stand of colors against a Britisher's protest—a Britisher's ineffectual protest,

THE VAGABOND

sir. And General Scott shook up the arm-chairs in Washington and made me a lieutenant, sir! Yes, sir, and I helped pay him back down in Mexico two years ago. There was a campaign for you—a campaign done to a chalk line! No rough-and-ready, whoop-it-up, don't-know-where-your-commissary-is, never-mind-your-flankers style for him. He waited till he was good and ready and then he hit the greasers in the pit of the stummick, and before they could get their breath he hit 'em again, and kept hitting 'em again quiet and easy-like all the way to 'hellangone' and the City of Mexico. And now, sir, what is Congress going to do? It's going to investigate General Scott! *Investigate General Scott!*"

After this explosion the Captain wondered why his enthusiasm should have carried him so far in a recital unsuited for a boy's ears.

Except for the conclusion that it was a great outrage, the Vagabond was very much in doubt both about General Scott and the investigation. However, the interest showing in his face was that of an intense partisan. It seemed scarcely possible that he was not in a dream. Did this old soldier, did the food and the curios on the wall, really exist?

"Have you ever been around the world—*clear* around?" he asked, as if an affirmative were too good to believe.

"Twice! Sailing pots and pans the first time; reefing sails the second."

"Well, you—you," said Billy, slowly, as he dropped his knife and fork, "you are just the man I wanted to meet."

Had the Captain seen the Andes and the Hima-

THE VAGABOND

layas? He fired a fusillade of questions while he finished his meal; and then his host—a thing he had not done since he came to the Post—told him the story of his trophies, from antlers to Indian arrows. “That head-dress I got from Crouching Eagle under Tippecanoe William Henry Harrison, against the red devil’s intentions, too.” And Billy asked, “How?” as he did to every statement. “Well, sir, he tried to tomahawk me, but I hit him first. It’s a great virtue, that of hitting the other fellow first, son. Saves yourself trouble—He! he!—and the other fellow, too.”

Never had the Captain had so appreciative a listener. He grew young in heart with the pleasure of entertaining youth. At the same time that he felt foolish, this veteran, telling a boy the story of his life, he was more elated than he had been for many a year. When he had explained the origin of a Toledo blade captured at Mexico, the last article on the wall whose history was untold, he said:

“Now, sitting doesn’t seem to be exactly in your department to-day. You’ll have to lie down the way most of the greasers that was wounded did in hospital—on your belly. Take that lounge there!”

Resting his chin on his hands, one leg in the air, the Vagabond looked at the Captain with a wistfulness that not only called for more but sought to forestall the breaking of his dream.

“After the war, General Scott sent me out here,” the Captain went on. “He said it was a good place to rest. ’Tis—too good! I belong a little farther West. I don’t feel at home with these young West Pointers. When it comes to drawing a fort out of your head I can’t quite keep step. Handling infantry’s my busi-

THE VAGABOND

ness; handling it in a war, sir. Yes, sir, and as it happens, they've discovered gold in California and they need soldiers out there."

"Gold! Gold!" repeated the Vagabond. For after the girl was the mountain, and after the mountain the mine.

"Yes, sir, gold! The Americans found it after the Spanish had been looking for it for two centuries. Yes, sir. So General Scott's sending my company to 'Frisco. There'll be plenty of work out there and room to swing a cat without catching its claws in a New England town meeting, and that's what Bob Herrick likes. Going straight around the Horn in a brig called the Natty Nancy, Captain Jabez Goodrich commanding."

Around the Horn to the Rocky Mountains in a ship whose very name tripped like an adventurous boy's heart-beats! And there was gold in the Rocky Mountains and the girl was there! His eyelids were almost splitting, while his imagination soared. He supposed that he ought to say something, and he said "Yes, sir," with a great sigh of longing.

That sigh went straight to the Captain's heart. He had never seen hope and anticipation so strongly pictured on any human face as in the freckled one before him. Sixty years of ill-health is selfishly edging toward comfort; sixty years of good health finds its happiness in the happiness of others. He knew what a lift would have meant to him when he was running away. The project that entered his mind was worthy of his eccentricity and his great heart. Suddenly he put on his full official severity of manner and demeanor.

THE VAGABOND

"There's three kinds of skunks in this world," he said; "quitters, cheap quitters, and derved cheap quitters. A quitter's the fellow that drops into a ditch when the charge is sounded; a cheap quitter's the fellow that falls out on the march to the fight; a derved cheap quitter's the fellow that gets engaged to all the girls he can 'fore he enlists and whoops it up like a brass band, but gets the belly-ache and goes to the hospital as soon as there's any work to do. Yes, sir. And what kind of a quitter are you?"

The Captain asked the question savagely. The boy's eyes, which had met his unflinchingly, met them unflinchingly still, only he thrust his square chin forward indignantly.

"I'm no kind of a quitter," he said, decidedly.

He had passed the recruit's examination without knowing it. The Captain hitched his chair over beside the Vagabond with something of the caution and zest of a boy who is approaching the shelf where abides the jam-pot.

"Say," he asked, unctuously, "how'd you like to be my boy? How'd you like to go to California with—"

A pair of arms flew around the Captain's neck in choking embrace.

"Oh, sir, honest, honest?" the Vagabond cried.

"Honest Injun, if you don't hug me to death."

"You—you're just the man I've been looking for. I'm so happy I don't know what to say."

"You ain't taken the oath yet," added the Captain. "Stand up in the middle of the room, heels together, head thrown back. There, that's right! Now, you promise on your honor as a soldier that you'll get up every morning at reveille?"

THE VAGABOND

"Yes, sir."

"You won't snivel about it? You'll never snivel?"

"No, sir. I didn't snivel once while I was running away."

"Course you didn't. S'pose a man forty years in the United States Army'd want you 'round if you had? Promise you'll never be sassy; you'll never call me Cap, but always Captain; you'll learn the manual of arms till you can do it slick as a sergeant-major?"

"Yes, sir."

"So help me God!" the Captain concluded, almost fiercely.

"So help me God!" the Vagabond repeated, impressively.

And then the Captain became the bigger boy of the two. The Vagabond asked questions, and would have gone on asking questions all night if the Captain had not had a bed made on the couch and warned him that it was time to turn in.

"I'm just too happy to sleep," said the Vagabond; but fatigue showed otherwise, and his last words as he dropped off were: "Around the Horn to the Rocky Mountains—the Natty Nancy, Captain Jabez Goodrich. Just—think—of—it!"

The shadow of the Captain's body was between the candle on the table and the couch. For some time he sat in revery, wondering what had made him adopt a runaway on an hour's acquaintance. He tried to analyze the Vagabond's charm and could not. It was impalpable and omnipresent. Whenever he had his folly in bold relief as quickly was it dissipated by the picture of the boy as he recited his story; by a yearning in his heart, common to all bachelors with neither

THE VAGABOND

kith nor kin, which had been satisfied by an affection. Finally, he arose to go above to his living-room, but stopped on the stair. He had forgotten a certain function for the first time since his incumbency at this Post. So he returned to the sideboard and poured out a good two fingers of the best New Bedford. On the plains, "where a man lives a natural life," he forewent the precaution; but in the East he regarded his constitutional night-cap as the one preventive of what he called the "fevers of civilization."

Back on the stair, he paused again. What was that he heard? His adopted son had awakened and was sobbing. He returned and put the candle on the table.

"Well, well!" he said, loudly.

The Vagabond rose from his pillow.

"I'm not snivelling, honest I'm not," he said, passionately. "I'm ashamed of myself. I was mean and selfish. I was so happy I forgot Tim Booker. I can't go unless he goes, too. Tim and I made a bargain. I was to wait for him and he was to catch up and go with me."

The old man had changed into the drill-sergeant instantly, and perplexity was added to his severity, as he stood with one hand on the table looking even more severe than he had at the barrack gates. He felt as if he had been cheated. His feeling and his actions had been on the basis—which pleased him—of a boy who had been projected from the clouds, unattended and unconnected, into his care. And he was a man of the quickest decision in all matters.

"Well, sir, I can't take two!" he said, sharply.

No Natty Nancy! No voyage around the Horn! Two thousand miles on foot to the Rocky Mountains!

THE VAGABOND

Billy gulped two or three times. He moistened his lips with the tip of his tongue. A wavering, almost inaudible, whistle passed between them and a forced smile overspread his face in slow effort.

"Then, sir," he said, with his head thrown back, "night's my best time for travelling, and I want to get away from those notices, where I can write to Tim."

"God Almighty!" exclaimed the Captain, abstractedly, in his admiration. "But I'd like to enlist you!"

Billy had risen and was valiantly reaching for his hat.

"No," said the Captain, still severely, "you stay here all night and all day to-morrow and rest up. Then you can travel faster. You needn't worry. I've given the word that there's no use of looking for you here, and when you give the word in the army there's an end of it. We aren't concealing runaway boys, no, sir! As for our bargain, it was for *one*—one boy!"

With that, the Captain picked up the candle and stamped up the stairs with mixed feelings of regret, chagrin, and rage.

VII

UNLESS THEY TAKE TO REASONING

Certain that his dream was shattered, by nature of the kind that does not cry over spilt milk but looks sharply to the remaining whole jars, of the two the Vagabond slept better than his host. In the middle of the night the Captain found himself awake and saying:

"There's loyalty for you! There's a tent-mate! There's a boy to set an example to the laggards on the march!"

His guest was still asleep when he descended the stairs at sun-up. He drew the curtains to keep out the light, and tiptoed out of the room, finding in this solicitude a pleasurable sensation that he could not explain. For some time he walked up and down in the barrack enclosure, and when he re-entered his quarters the Vagabond was awake and cheerful—too cheerful for the Captain's self-esteem.

"Seems to me," said the host at breakfast, "that you've got a pretty big job on your hands, walking clear to the Rocky Mountains."

"Yes, sir. That's why I'll like it—if I can only get away from those notices. Those notices aren't fair."

This was precisely the soldier's own opinion, and he came near declaring as much, emphatically.

"But you'll meet with a lot of obstacles," he persisted. "It ain't thickly settled like it is here—a lot of obstacles!"

THE VAGABOND

"Yes, sir; that will make it interesting. Don't you like surprises, sir?"

"Hm-m-m! Not so much as I did when I was a boy."

"Maybe I like surprises because I haven't had any. I feel just as if a lot was owed me."

"What if that friend of yours, Mr. Booker——"

"*Tim* Booker. It's too funny to call Tim Mister!"

"What if Tim Booker, when he comes after you—— what if he don't want to go to the Rocky Mountains?"

"He said he'd travel just as far as I wanted. He wants to see the world, too."

The Captain coughed. He was a little jealous of Tim Booker. Besides, he was wroth with his soldierly self for harping on a matter which he had already dismissed with a decision. Nevertheless, he went on somewhat querulously—for him, very querulously:

"You must like Tim pretty well to hoof it to the Rockies with him, instead of having a ride on a ship all the way."

"It isn't liking. It's sticking by Tim when I said I would." Billy's eyes grew moist with the thought of what he had lost. "Oh, sir, I wish you wouldn't say anything more about that. It makes the shivers go up and down my back."

"Very good," said the Captain. He hitched up a little closer to the table and scowled at his coffee-cup. "What kind of a man is this—this Tim Booker?" he asked, with drill-sergeant acerbity.

"Oh, he's the best fellow that ever was, and the biggest liar," was the fitting description.

"Liar! liar!" thundered the Captain. "And you choose to run away with him!"

THE VAGABOND

"But his eyes always twinkle when he lies. He just lies for fun."

"For fun!" roared the Captain.

"He makes up stories to amuse you, but you look at him sharp and he tells the truth every time. He's all truth and heart and a good fellow, is Tim."

"How does he walk? Like this?" The Captain jumped to his feet and slouched across the room, his breast sunk between his shoulders in imitation of a lout.

"No, sir; like this!" was Billy's indignant response; and he arose and made a circuit around the Captain with his head thrown back and his hands in his pockets. "That's where I learned it myself," he added, proudly.

"The devil you did!" The Captain took two or three turns on his own account, and coming to a standstill abruptly, said: "Mind, I'm not holding out any promises; no, sir! But I'm going to send for Mr. Booker. Maybe we can patch up some kind of an arrangement."

"Will you! Will you!" Billy cried, his words palpitating with joy. "I'll write to Tim at once!"

"Yes, only I'll tell you what to say. Remember, no false hopes!" The Captain placed ink and paper on the table. "Captain Robert Herrick, U. S. A.," he dictated, while the quill creaked, "has offered to adopt me and take me to California. He would consider it a favor if you would come to this Post to confer with him about the matter. Yours truly."

"Is that all?" Billy asked, rubbing the feather against his chin.

"Yes, all. A soldier is brief, my son, always brief."

THE VAGABOND

"Mayn't I just add a few words here?" He pointed below his signature.

"What?"

"This, sir," and the Vagabond scribbled beneath the formal sentences: "Tim, please *do* hurry up."

This oddity of a letter was sealed and sent and the Vagabond remained the Captain's guest, while that notice of "Fifty Dollars Reward" still stared from the pillar at the passers-by. On the third day Tim, attired in store clothes, was ushered into the Captain's room. His first act was to shake Billy and his next to hold him out at arms' length and scan him from head to foot fondly—all this quite regardless of the presence of a third person.

"Say, Billy, that train I rode on went a hundred miles an hour."

"No train goes a hundred miles an hour!" said the Captain, sharply.

"This one did," drawled Tim, lowering one eyelid a little—"while I was telling the story."

The Captain fairly snorted. This seemed to amuse Tim, who was still inwardly laughing at the "plumb dumb foolishness" of that man in uniform pacing up and down between the pillars. It seemed to him that it would not be quite as great a waste of energy if the sentry were given a teething baby to hold.

"That's only one of Tim's jokes," said the Vagabond, trying to play the diplomat in this critical moment.

"It's no time for joking, sir," said the Captain, in his most official tone. "Let us get to business. I have proposed to adopt this boy and take him with me to California. Yes, sir, I propose to make him my

THE VAGABOND

own son. But it seems, sir, that you have a bargain with him to travel together. I hope, sir, you aren't going to interfere with his opportunity. I hope, sir, you will see the point and release him."

The Captain's tone was as fierce as his gaze. Tim replied, blandly:

"No, sir. I'm all ready to travel. No, sir, I won't release him. Do you stick to *me*, Billy?"

"Yes," Billy faltered.

"Yes, he does!" roared the Captain. "He's loyal. On my word, do you realize what you are doing?"

He proceeded to harangue Tim at length, and fairly lost his temper when he found that no military brusqueness could faze the big, self-respecting farm-hand, a fact which tended to raise Tim in his esteem.

"Well," said Tim, "I've got the gold fever about as bad as any man that ever hoed corn for sixteen dollars a month. Suppose you let me go 'long on the Natty Nancy. I guess I've got enough to pay my fare."

"Yes, yes, let's!" Billy cried. He sprang into the middle of the room and saluted, his smile and his eyes speaking for him with an eloquence greater than words. "If you'll let Tim go, Captain, I'll have my breakfast before reveille, I'll go to bed an hour before taps, I'll do the manual of arms a dozen times a day!"

The Captain scowled and looked away from them both in thought. When he looked back he had turned the catechist.

"California's some distance from apple-pies," he said. "You ever get homesick, Tim Booker?"

"Yes, I did once—when I was home. That's why I run away."

"Now, Mr. Booker, suppose you'd marched till your

THE VAGABOND

pack was a lump of lead; yes, sir, of *burning* lead! Suppose your tongue was swelling from thirst; suppose the sun was a furnace that kept your shirt wet and didn't dry it, parboiling your back. Suppose there was five miles to do 'fore camp and all you'd get when 'twas pitched was sow-belly (bacon) 'n' hard-tack. Suppose, then, you stumbled on a piece of fruit right in your path, nice, big, juicy fruit! What'd you do?"

"Well," Tim replied, "I'd be thinking, considering circumstances, I had about all I could carry."

"The fruit, sir! What'd you do with the fruit?"

"Nothing. I wouldn't want to carry any more on my back, and if I tried to carry it on an empty stomach I'd get the colic."

"Mr. Booker!" The Captain threw back his shoulders to add force to the eulogy, "I've asked a thousand rookies that question. They all tried to say something real smart, so what did they say? Yes, sir, what did they say? They said they'd divide with the next fellow in the ranks! Then, sir, two'd have the belly-ache!" he concluded, triumphantly.

"I don't see much good in that, 'cept they'd be comp'ny for one 'nuther," Tim rejoined.

The Captain slapped his knees, while he laughed heartily:

"You've got a sense of humor, sir," he kept repeating, "a sense of humor, sir! Only they wouldn't be company. One'd say the other'd poisoned him, and the other'd call him an ingrate. Mr. Booker, I'm a soldier and you're not. At first thought, we're not the kind to get on together at all. But, Mr. Booker, you hold your head up; you look me in the eye, sir. I want

THE VAGABOND

you to come along and I'll arrange it with Captain Jabez Goodrich, sir."

The Vagabond's joy was too great for expression in words—he hugged the Captain.

"Thank you, sir," said Tim, finally. The Captain had used so many "sirs" that Tim thought he could afford one himself. "You've been square with me and I'll be square with you, sir. Honest, I didn't intend to stand in Billy's way to the last. I wanted to see how much Billy cared for me. I'm drestle fond of him—I'm so fond of him I wouldn't do anything to hurt his chances. If I'll be any bother, you take Billy and leave me behind."

"I'm damned if I do!" roared the Captain. "After speaking up like that, you go with us, Mr. Booker; yes, sir, you go with us!"

This seemed to settle the matter for good and all; and it would if the Captain had not happened to re-read that notice on the pillar carefully. As a consequence, he not only appreciated Judge John Williams's importance in the world, but he recalled a bit of information from the Vagabond's own tale, namely, that the Judge was the Vagabond's uncle. Starting with this premise, argument after argument rose in opposition to his course. First of all, he was literally stealing a boy from his guardian; and who should obey the law if not a soldier? he asked himself. The Judge, he learned, was a bachelor, with no family ties in the world except his nephew, and here was a man of honor proposing to take a ward from a lawful guardian by stealth. When his doubts had gone this far, he sought the confidence of Tim; and together, when Billy was entertaining himself to his

THE VAGABOND

heart's content by drawing pictures, they walked across the fields in consultation. All the Captain's fears became Tim's.

"Now you look at it in that way," Tim said, in that drawl which stood for the bed-rock of his nature, "that's what we are—a pair of kidnappers. I guess, though you are a soldier and I'm a farm-hand, there's something between us. We're both chockful of sentiment. We ain't either of us got any kith or kin, and we're so independent we're selfish. I guess because ninety-nine out of a hundred men would laugh at us for a pair of fools that don't make us any less so. All we've been thinking of is our own pleasure. Billy has a way with him—a way of talking up and looking at you with those blue eyes of his—that makes you want to help him get what he wants."

"By the Eternal! That's it exactly," assented the Captain. "The way he told his story to me—well, sir, I've never been so affected before in my life. I was a boy again. I don't mean in imagination; I mean in the flesh, in the heart!"

"Well, I seen him live what he told you. I seen him smiling when he was in jail, smiling to think of how he was going to travel one day and climb his mountain. Well, I was a vagabond at heart myself. I wanted to travel with him. I wanted him to have his heart's desire. Come to think of it, about all we can do for him is to show him the mountain. In the world as we know it, that ain't much. Why, if a vote of Belmore County was to be taken on who'd make the best guardian of a boy, the Judge'd win out by a whopping majority. He can do everything you 'n' I, as I look at it, can't do. Why, he will send him to col-

THE VAGABOND

lege, probably Harvard or Yale!" (To college! In these days we scarcely appreciate the charm of the word in the New England of '49.) "No, sir, we haven't got any right, Captain. We're playing fairy story. We're a pair of sentimental fools—God please you, I'm proud of being one!—but we've no right to rob that boy of his opportunities."

It was the longest, most serious speech Tim had ever made, and it throbbed from the depths of his nature.

"No, sir, we've not; no, sir!" said the Captain, with decision. "We've got to turn him over to the Judge and there's an end of it. But who's going to tell him?" the veteran asked, almost fearfully. "I've stormed Chapultepec and I've fought Injuns hand to hand and British regulars face to face all day long; but that's nothing beside this job. I'll start, but if I begin to stumble on account of the way he looks at me with those blue eyes, you've got to jump in and help me out."

"I will. The two of us ought to make it together all right. If I had to do it alone I'd want to be blind-folded."

So the pair, their minds made up, walked back slowly and found Billy drawing a portrait of the sergeant-major, while he artfully gleaned much about the personality of a certain girl, the information as to her charms as a "good fellow" entirely according with his expectations. The Captain asked him to come inside, and after "We've something to tell you," and several coughs, with the assistance of Tim, he made his decision known. Of the three, the boy was the most masterful. He threw back his head; he whistled the

THE VAGABOND

dismallest of trills and he forced a smile, as Tim had bidden him, the while he looked at Tim, who shifted his gaze to the wall. His wondering blue eyes said "And thou, too, Brutus"? His quivering lips, making no sound, bespoke his misery over the revelation of friends turned enemies. Thus he shamed them, and also with his grave taciturnity which bespoke a heart too full for utterance. To the announcement by the Captain that they would start for Belmore on the morrow, he replied, "Yes, sir"; and a "yes, sir," or "no, sir," was the most that he said. His elders were embarrassed, and, truth to tell, almost in tears. Billy sat for some time quite still after they had left the room in search of change and relief from his appealing eyes. Then he went to the table, screwed his legs around the leg of a chair, and picking up the quill wrote:

"DEAR FRIENDS:

"No doubt you think you are doing what is best for me. There is just where we disagree. I suppose, as you say, most boys would be glad to have such a guardian as the Judge. I don't know any other boys. I just know what kind of a boy I am myself. I just know that I wouldn't like to live with the Judge. For I looked him over *very* carefully. He would be all the worse because he looks and acts so wise. He would put his hand on my head and twiddle his watch-fob and say: 'Now, go learn your lessons, William, and maybe you will know as much as I do some day.' I don't want to know as much about the same things he does. I want to know about things he don't know about. There's where we disagree, and what is the

THE VAGABOND

good when you disagree? Why, when you disagree, you go your way and the other fellow goes his.

"I don't see what claim the Judge has got on me. He never came to our place before my father died. All he thinks is, 'I have got to take care of this little boy, I suppose, and look wise and smile sometimes, as a matter of duty.' I don't want to be his son, and, when he does not want me, why should I? My bargain with you, Tim, was to run away. My bargain with the Captain was to go around the Horn. You broke your bargains. You remember I asked you, Captain, if you invited me into your house just to lock me in. I liked you both so much, you have almost broken my heart. But I would not be very much of a man if I stopped travelling because two friends deserted me.

"I do not think it exactly fair of you to help the Judge. I suppose it is because you are so old you do not understand a boy's heart. I don't want you to feel hard toward me, either, for doing what I cannot help. All the time I lived in that old house I was thinking of the time when I should be free. When it seemed so hard being shut up because it seemed just as if I was born to travel, I used to pluck up my courage thinking that some day I would have a mountain all to myself. Now I am free I will not go into bondage again. As soon as I get away from those notices I will get along all right. A boy can sleep almost anywhere. I never did like feather-beds. They are too stuffy, anyway. A boy can earn enough to eat, you said so, Tim, so long as he holds his head up. Maybe I will be three or four years reaching the Rocky Mountains." (Here he had an impulse to tell

THE VAGABOND

who had gone to the Rocky Mountains before him, what an object he had. But the girl was his secret, which he vowed never to share with anyone.) "What if I am three or four years? I'll be moving all the time; moving, moving, and that is what I have always said I would do when I was free. You said it right, Captain, when you said I was a vagabond. The Judge may catch me, but he cannot keep me. Tell him that for me, so he will know that I gave him fair warning. I will run away from him every chance I get and keep on running until I am away for good.

"There, that is all, I guess. I have written a lot because I feel such a lot. I am leaving all the money you gave me, Tim, except what I spent. I will pay back the rest as soon as I can. Thank you, Tim, for all your good advice and making me laugh so often when I needed laughs a lot. It is hard to say good-by, but I must. Good-by, Tim. Good-by, Captain. I hate to sneak away, but I must.

"Yours truly,

"BILLY.

"P. S.—I am leaving some pictures I drew of you both, to remember me by."

The letter was finished and fast in the Vagabond's pocket when the Captain and Tim returned to the little sitting-room. Through the rest of the day he was as tractable as ever, if he had little to say. After his elders were asleep he placed the folded sheet on the table with the gold piece as a weight, and, turning the catch, lifted the window softly, inch by inch, and recommenced his journey into the world.

VIII

WHEN YOU MUST START AFRESH

This time he did not follow the setting sun, for he had an idea that his pursuers, knowing his bent, would move westward. Also, he thought that the zone of the notices might not be as broad as it was long and he could pass out of it sooner by going toward the north. Here he was in error. His first descent upon a village revealed the reward for him still standing beside that of the reward for Bingo, the slave.

On the morning of the second day he began to realize that berries are not as sustaining as a mixed diet. He dared not follow the road for fear of discovery. The sun was hot, his path one never-ending field of stubble. When fatigue and hunger had made his legs wobbly, the sight of a tumble-down shanty, left by the Irish workmen who had built the railroad ten years before, suggested both concealment and rest.

"I'll sleep till after dark," he told himself, "and then I'll travel all night, and in the morning—yes, I'll risk it."

By risking it he meant that he would ask to split wood or do anything else he could turn his hand to in order to earn his breakfast. The door of the shanty was closed. He began to push it in, when a great, thick voice from the inside cried:

THE VAGABOND

"I kill yo'! I kill yo'! Sho's theh's a Gawd in hebben, I kill yo' 'fore I go back Souf!"

"Have a look at a thing before you get scared about it," Billy warned himself.

He desisted in his effort only to satisfy his curiosity. He crept to the window and peeked in to see a Titanic negro, the blurry whites of his eyes showing wide, with a club uplifted, ready to lay on the head of the intruder.

"You needn't fear me," Billy said. "I'm not going to take you South."

At sight of the boy, Bingo dropped his club, opening his mouth as wide as his eyes and showing twice as much white.

"Good Lawd o' mercy! It's only a bo-oy, a l'l' bo-oy! I was 'sleep dar." He pointed to a quilt in a corner. "I done had a dream. Dey wuz han'cuffin' me. I jump up an' dar wuz somebody at de doah. De dream's comin' true, I says. De good Lawd has wawned me. Ise a'most out o' de wilderness now an' I done gwine t' die an' go t' de Promise' Lan' one way or tother."

Billy began to climb in at the window. Already he regarded Bingo as only a big child to be humored.

"Where is the Promised Land?" he asked.

"Up in Can'dy. All niggahs is free dyah an' kin hol' up deir haid same as white men."

"Well, you want to hold up your head anyway, if you expect to escape," observed Billy, sagely.

Hunted himself, his young heart went out to the hunted. He would not then have joined in the chase of a dog. The sight of this poor, speaking piece of property in his own form ever remained with him.

THE VAGABOND

Bingo explained that he was kept in hiding here until his allies in breaking the law were ready to send him on to the next station, where other abolitionists would do as much for him.

"Dey's monst'ous good to me, dey is. Ham 'n' eggs fer brekfus an' pie—*an' pie!*"

"Pie for breakfast?" asked Billy.

"No! Lawd, no! Co'se not. Dis yearth ain' heben nohow. Pie fer dinnah—two pieces! Ef yo' is a runaway yo' go t' dat white house ober dyah. Dey's white folks, dey is, brack man's white folks."

"Who are they?" Billy asked.

"Dey is Missy F'lissy, des Missy F'lissy. My! She's des mos' monst-ous prim! Yes, suh, ef yo's a runaway yo' go see her."

"I'm going to have a look at her, Bingo." Billy held out a palm whose blisters from the freight car coupling were turning to callous.

"Yo', a white boy—wid a niggah! Lawd! Ise near de Promise' Lan' fo' sho."

He enveloped Billy's hand in his great fingers. Abolitionists had fed him, secreted him at the risk of prosecution, petted him as if he were a precious souvenir, and yet this boy, with genuine camaraderie, was the first to offer him the grasp of social equality.

Blinking through the foliage, Billy could see from the shanty itself pieces of white pillar and white wall of the place that befriended runaways. Unobserved he approached until he was under the cover of a large evergreen-tree in the yard. From this vantage-point he studied the situation.

Here was a house set back in seclusion from the road, yet as different from the one he had known, as

THE VAGABOND

new from rusty tin. On the porch sat a personage in keeping with her surroundings. From the high shell-comb in her back hair to her kid slippers, there were no flapping ends in the neat make-up of Miss Felicia, only daughter of the late Senator Hope. Her years were thirty, perhaps, her primness making them indefinite at first glance. She was crocheting a strip of lace in the manner of one who must do so many inches in a certain length of time or lose caste forever. The ensemble of house and lady, and especially the mechanical and unceasing course of the long needle in and out, convincing as it was of a well-stocked larder, at the same time suggested nothing less than sympathy with boys who did not remain strictly under the wing of their guardians.

His discretion was dulling his hunger; he was about to depart when the lady looked up from her work and smiled, not in the least merrily, not beamingly, but quietly, sedately, in the manner of one who contemplates a good deed. At least, she was in favorable humor. Surely, living in this big house well on the outskirts of a village, she had not read that notice, said his stomach, throwing the balance in its favor.

The next moment, hat in hand, Billy stood before Felicia Hope.

"Could I split some wood for you for a piece of bread and butter?" he asked.

"Nobody willing to work ever came to the Hope house and went away hungry," she replied. "You're pretty young to be tramping. Where are you from, the village?"

The last word was spoken mechanically. Billy saw

THE VAGABOND

that she was looking him over from head to foot. He could fairly hear her thinking: "Freckled face, linsy-woolsey pants, gingham shirt, blue eyes, and head held high."

"I'm not as hungry as I thought," he said, hastily. It was the only excuse that came to his mind. "I'll hurry along."

He turned abruptly on his heel, only to see a figure in beaver hat and black coat entering the gate—a figure that he instantly recognized as his uncle. He was going to dodge behind the trees and make a run for it, but realized the futility of the effort. If the Judge could not overtake him, he might find someone less portly who would. It was an awful fate to be trapped between that severe, high shell-comb and that severe high hat. Never had he so wished for man's estate and especially a man's legs. The Judge laid his hand on his nephew's head, which was precisely what his nephew had feared that he would do.

"Well, well!" he said. "You got tired of running away and thought Belmore wasn't such a bad place after all, my prodigal?"

Prodigal! Billy had always hated that story. He regarded the prodigal as the rankest, most worthless "quitter" on record.

"I didn't know this was Belmore," he stormed back. "I came north to get away from those notices. You let me go and I'll show you, sir. You take down those notices and you'll just have to come to the Rocky Mountains if you want to see me. I'll leave it to that lady. All I asked was to split wood for something to eat."

THE VAGABOND

"You have some spirit, I see," the Judge observed, with a smile of satisfaction which Billy completely misinterpreted. It set him into a trembling rage. He felt as if he were a mouse being played with by a cat.

"Do you have to keep your hand on my head just to show how big you are and how small I am?" he demanded.

"Oh, no, William," the Judge replied. "But I'm not going to let you run away again—not just yet. Your persistence is really very creditable. Suppose we have something to eat and then we'll talk the matter over."

By this time Billy saw the futility of anger and was once more John Smith's son going after the weekly paper.

IX

FEARING NOT A JUDICIAL MIEN

The Judge's calls on Miss Felicia were of too long standing to be a topic of discussion. They had become merely a matter of opinion in the county seat whence Plaronville sent her squabbling lawyers, her jurors, and her criminals. "She'll have him yet," said the Democrats. "Never," said the Whigs.

His attentions had begun when her father was still the ruler of the Whig stronghold of the State, and he was a struggling young lawyer of unflagging Democratic principles. Far from allowing public knowledge of the failure of his petitions to the throne to discourage him, he continued them with the gentle persistence of an equable and confident nature. Incidentally, he was Miss Felicia's attorney. She asked his advice in the management of the estate that the Senator had left her; pretended to believe it quite unsound, and usually followed it.

She owed his call on this occasion to the poor, stupid fifteen hundred dollars worth of property lying on a quilt in a shanty. Everyone knew of the lady's strong Abolition sentiments; no one suspected that His Honor, who had been elected by Democratic votes, was assistant keeper of a station of the underground route that sent slaves to Canada. After every rescue he told her that he—he, a judge—would never consent to break a statute again, however inhuman

THE VAGABOND

it was. She replied, with precise choice of language, that she was far from need of assistance from one who was so timid. Nevertheless, when word came from the receiving bureau in Maryland, she had only to despatch a note to the court-house for her recruit to enter into the work with a youthful enjoyment and cunning which his legal sense strongly condemned.

Besides the slave, these two good people now had the boy to consider. Miss Felicia first introduced him, sternly, to forestall the resistance that she expected, to a big basin of water. He surprised her by thrusting his head into it with a great splatter. Cleanliness was inherent in him. While he sat up at the table eating what a colored maid—whose freedom had been bought—put before him, the Judge and Miss Felicia were discussing both runaways. It was agreed that the boy should remain with her for the present. She insisted permanently, and the Judge replied that their first object must be to disabuse him of his vagaries and make him happy and contented.

"You'll be comfortable here to-night," he told the Vagabond on leaving the house. "To-morrow, when you are rested, I'll show you Belmore and we'll have a talk."

"Yes, sir," was the reply—an inscrutable "yes, sir," that made the Judge pucker his brows.

The Vagabond had put himself on record as intending to run away and to keep on running away until he was pursued no farther. He even received encouragement to stick to his threat from the colored maid who put him to bed.

THE VAGABOND

"I gets so lonesome I feels like runnin' myse'f. Dis hyah place des so prim! Sakes alive! I gets dat humsick fo' Virginny I'd like to hyah ole massa say, 'G'long, yo' niggahs! Who tol' yo' stick yo' brack faces in hyah?' Miss F'lissy des de goodest woman in de worl', Lawd, yes! She's too good! Yes, suh-h-h!"

The aspect of the room itself gave point to the maid's words. The counterpane was too suggestively stiff; the blue and white china too blue and too white; and the cat marked on the splasher over the wash-stand too rigid and watchful. The pressing sense of exact and angular proportions helped the Vagabond in the trying ordeal of keeping awake until midnight.

In order to descend from the roof of Miss Felicia's porch he had to leap from it upon the limb of a tree, the most difficult feat in gymnastics of this sort that he had yet performed in his struggle for liberty. Yet he was quite confident that it was nothing for a mountain-climber in the bright moonlight. As he crept to the edge of the roof and peeked over, who should he see on the gravel-walk at this hour but Miss Felicia herself, with a woollen shawl thrown over her head and shoulders. He drew back for a bad minute. Peeking over again, he saw that she had not seen him. No more had John, the coachman, who came leading a horse and covered buggy from the barn at noiseless pace; no more had the Judge, who came walking across the fields. It was different with the keen, savage glance of his hunted black companion.

"Who dat ar—dat ar on yo' po'ch?" he asked.

THE VAGABOND

The Judge looked, understood, and bade the negro be quiet. When the buggy, Bingo's pitiful gratitude dying on the night air, passed on down the road, the Judge whispered something to Miss Felicia before he called out in his great, far-carrying voice:

"William, do you prefer a roof to a bed?"

It was not easy to take the Vagabond unawares.

"No, sir," he replied. "I was going to run away and you've caught me."

He had a scheme back of his reply, but the Judge checkmated it.

"Now, William," he said, kindly, "we can lock you in. If that isn't enough, one of us can wait here all night to break your fall when you come down. William, I want you to promise me on your word of honor that you won't run away to-night."

"Yes, sir; I give my word."

And so, in humiliation, he crept back to bed.

"I am afraid that is a much bigger task than the one we have just finished," said Miss Felicia, delighted over increased opportunities for doing good. Had the world been already reformed she would have been rather miserable.

"Possibly not. I like his spirit. He has my father's chin and a good forehead besides. I think when we have had our conference I shall bring him around." The foremost orator of the county was bound to have confidence in his powers. "He has come to me like a gift from Heaven. I mean to rear him as if he were my own, and in my later years to live over my youth in him."

"That is all very well," said the practical woman. "What he most needs now, John"—she used this word

THE VAGABOND

only when she wanted to gain a point and he always thrilled with it—"is a woman's care; not a *hired* woman's! And a hired woman is the best you can provide. You must let him remain here with me until he is old enough to go to Andover."

The moonlight played on Miss Felicia's face. Despite her scorn for beauty as a superfluity, no one could deny that she was at least fine looking. Her earnest words added to her charm, under whose spell the Judge forgot all past rebuffs; forgot even the boy, already sound asleep, except as a means to an end. As an orator he must, perforce, approach the main argument with an exordium:

"You have shown the way," he said, putting one foot a little in front of the other and thrusting three fingers between the top buttons of his waistcoat. "The boy does need the soft, directing hand and the gentle sympathy of a mother; he does need, as well, the firm hand, the advice, the fellowship of a father. The one is as much the corollary of the other as the moon and the sun, the night and the day."

"Which is the day?" asked Miss Felicia, her lips twitching ever so little with amusement.

But the Judge was used to interruptions on the stump.

"The mother! She is the summer; the father the winter. Without the one, the boy will be all night; without the other, all day. Felicia, a young life has been intrusted to us. A boy of overflowing spirit, who may be of great account in the world, must receive the stamp of a character worthy of his promise. Why should we be merely his guardians? Why——"

"It is getting chilly. Good-night, John," remarked

THE VAGABOND

Felicia. "We'll see how the boy behaves to-morrow."

"Yes, quite chilly," said the Judge to himself, as he walked away; "freezing, in fact. I wonder if there will never be a thaw. My God! I worship that woman!"

If she only could have heard this heartfelt outburst without any attempt at oratory!

X

BUT MEETING LOGIC WITH FAITH

The Judge had resolved on playing a great part the next day. He appeared early at the Hope house, with the serene consciousness that he had his exordium, his argument, his peroration, and his stage effects for rescuing the Vagabond from his fancies well in hand.

"Now to see the village and the court," he said, with heavy cheerfulness.

"Yes, sir," was the laconic answer.

So the uncle took the nephew's hand in his and started along the walk, while Miss Felicia, who watched them from the steps, was convinced that she knew a great deal better than John how to deal with that boy. From the road they could see through the avenue of trees to the main street, with its double row of frame houses. When the railroad came, Belmore told itself that it was going to grow. Finding that it did not, it fell back into its old way, with a contempt for any other, leaving such frivolities as progress to Plaronville, where the Judge himself would have gone but for his election to the bench and the presence of Miss Felicia, an unalterable Belmorean.

"I ran away from the same old farm that you did when I was twelve," the Judge began, unctuously.

"And is this as far as you got?" the Vagabond asked.

THE VAGABOND

The Judge was used to interruptions in his argument but not in his exordium, and he frowned and was silent long enough to give the Vagabond courage to put in a word about a matter that was most oppressive.

"I'd just as soon you wouldn't hold my hand in that way," he said. "I can walk alone."

"Oh!" was the most the uncle could say.

"Thank you!" replied the nephew, heartily.

Thus one of the Judge's favorite theories of practice was upset. He had been used to winning votes for his party by putting his hand on the head of the suffragist's son and saying, "Well, my little man!" The Vagabond had the objection to being handled of most boys, born for the open, when they reach the age of ten.

In anticipation, the Judge had enjoyed the effect of entering the square and announcing that the prepossessing boy whose hand he held was his nephew and thenceforth his ward. The absence of contact destroyed the romance of such a proceeding. Without stopping, he went up the court-house steps, bowing in reply to the volley of "Mornin', Jedge!" that greeted him from lawyers and jurymen who awaited his arrival. Throughout the hearing of a line fence dispute the Judge's audience was Billy, whom he had placed in a commanding seat. When he made a point of law overruling a lawyer's objections, he looked at Billy as he would at a campaign audience for applause. Afterward, when they were back in his office over the leading "general store," and had eaten a luncheon brought from the hotel across the street, the uncle proceeded again to his exordium.

THE VAGABOND

"How would you like to be a judge and sit up on the bench as I did this morning?" he asked.

"If you please, I would not like to at all. I would much rather climb a mountain," was the reply. "All the time that talk was going on I was listening to the birds."

"All that talk!" repeated the Judge. In the whole of his career he had never met a controversialist who so naturally and buoyantly and indubitably ran away with all the premises.

"Yes, sir. I can't help it. All that talk in that stuffy place just about that fence and a wise, big, learned man as you are wasting his time over it and the lawyers wasting their time and the jury wasting theirs, when there's gold in the Rocky Mountains and so much room in the world!"

The Judge concluded that the only thing was to go on, without asking questions that would bring interruptions. He was eloquent as eloquence went in those days. He described his own struggles; how he had worked his way through the academy; how he had read law on two hundred a year; and how honors had come to him. Finally, he pointed to the leather-backed rows on the four walls that made up the finest law library in the county and then to the works of history and biography in his bedroom adjoining.

"Everyone is a living being to me," he said. "Here at my hand I have all that the great codifiers of all ages have given to the world. I am never able to quote from one without a little feeling of pride."

"As if you had put another mile behind you, and—and the mountain was a little nearer," suggested Billy.

THE VAGABOND

"Yes, and I am not a day older without being a day wiser. That is the beauty of it. Knowledge is like a crown of jewels of unending increase, the love of its accumulation giving to old age the zest of youth. All these books I want to be yours. All my experience I want to be yours. You shall go farther than the academy—to the university! I want you to live with me and be my—my son."

But what authority was torts on gold mines or on shinning around the edge of a precipice? On the background of bulky volumes in a room unornamented except for steel engravings of Thomas Jefferson and John Marshall, all stiff and serene and dry wrinkles, the Judge was more ominous than ever. Billy spoke with the feeling of a boy who has escaped from one library to fall into another.

"I know you're a big, very big man and a very go-ood man," he said. "And Miss Felicia is also very go-ood. But I don't want to be big and sit on a bench. I want to travel and travel and climb a mountain—and I'll run away. I give you fair warning, I'll run away."

The best the Judge could do was to shake his head and take his charge back to Miss Felicia. There he left him on the porch, while he went in to confer with the lady. What could be more aggravating to a boy than to know that he was the subject of such a discussion? He looked out at the road and wished that night with its chance of escape was already at hand. When his mentors returned, the Judge was graver than before and Miss Felicia determined and evidently inspired by a new responsibility. What their decision was will never be known, for at that minute Cap-

THE VAGABOND

tain Robert Herrick, U. S. A., and Tim Booker entered the gate.

"Now you are all here!" cried the Vagabond, in tears of rage, "all except Jim Rawkins! Why didn't you bring him?"

"Don't say that, Billy!" the Captain said, so pathetically that Billy instantly regretted his outburst.

With a deep bow from the hips in recognition of a lady's presence, the old soldier told the whole story of their connection with the boy, Tim standing awkwardly by.

"We've hunted him high and low, sir," said the Captain, "and there's only one word for it—we feel mean, sir. You read this and you'll understand my point, sir."

He proffered Billy's farewell letter. When the Judge opened it the drawings fell out and the Captain explained them.

"*You* drew these!" the Judge exclaimed, turning to the Vagabond, who brightened instantly.

"Yes, sir. I like that. My father wouldn't let me draw. But when I get away where the mountain is I'm going to draw all I want to."

The Judge read the letter through slowly. He found it a good legal document, and tapped the paper with his finger when he came to the sentence, "I don't see what claim the Judge has got on me; he never came to our place before my father died." He was amazed at the composition for a ten-year-old boy.

"And I want to say to you, sir, for myself and Mr. Booker, that we want that boy; and if you'll give him up he shall go with us, sir, and——"

THE VAGABOND

"To California! Out among savages and swearing miners and wild animals! Do you want to make him a heathen?" gasped Miss Felicia, springing to her feet.

Captain Herrick also rose from his seat. At that moment he was in a mood to have kidnapped the Vagabond. His indignation only made him the more punctilious in bowing from the hips.

"Miss," he said, "no boy's morals will suffer in the company of an officer of the United States army!"

Miss Felicia, who knew nothing so well as the danger of her own temper, for fear that she would say something that she should be sorry for, dashed into the parlor, where she began nervously dusting furniture that was speckless. The Vagabond slipped down from his chair and went to the Captain's side and looked up at him, his lips parting and his blue eyes radiating his affection. His uncle observed the movement sadly.

"Have you had Latin? Anything besides English?"

The Vagabond named his books of Cæsar and Cicero as if they were so many demerits.

"You're ready for the academy now. You must have learned easily."

"I don't know, sir. I just learned, to keep peace. It seems to me I've learned enough to last me forever! I want some time for the things I like. Can't you see, sir, I don't like what you do?" he pleaded.

The Judge made no reply to this, but began walking up and down the length of the porch, his head bowed and his hands behind him. In puzzled silence

THE VAGABOND

the Captain and Tim watched his pacing, which he ended by passing into the drawing-room to Felicia.

"I have decided to let him go," he said. "I have no right to keep him."

"Have you lost your mind, John? Right! Right! What do you mean?" she cried.

"I mean that to put him in stays may ruin him—yes, it may turn his energy into bad channels."

"You shirk your duty. Your duty is to discipline him, to rear him properly. You shirk, John. I say it to your face."

"There are many differences of opinions and tastes in the world." Here the lawyer was completely submerged, the scholar wholly triumphant. "Our country is suffering from mistaken efforts at discipline at this moment. In South Carolina they think that Massachusetts people are property stealers and witch-burners. You know what we think of them. Discipline! It's forcing people to do what *you* want them to do. I would not have allowed my father to prevent my studying law, and this boy is entitled to follow his bent as much as I."

He was almost as surprised as she to find himself adamant against her stormings and pleadings.

"I didn't think you had so much backbone!" she cried at last, almost in admiration, and ran upstairs to her room to—yes, to cry in vexation.

The Judge returned to the group, which was still as silent as culprits in court awaiting his decision.

"You were logical," he said to Billy. "When I neglected you for so many years I have no right to your affection now."

THE VAGABOND

Then he turned away from the sight of his nephew burying his face against Captain Herrick's neck in the first faint appreciation of his heritage of happiness; for the Judge had grown fond of that freckle-faced boy.

XI

THAT WINS YOU A PASSAGE.

"Have you any money to invest?" the Captain asked Tim Booker, soon after the three were back at the Post.

"I guess when my fare's paid," said Tim, "the Natty Nancy won't be overloaded with my savings on sixteen dollars a month."

"Well, sir," the Captain rejoined, "just you risk it along with what I've got to spare. I'll tell you how and why, sir. To be explanatory, sir, and to make myself clear with a long story when a short story won't do, I've seen two thousand men in hospital in Mexico, sir. Yes, sir, when the volunteers—American volunteers, sir, as fine timber as ever grew and a little finer, without any intention of tunin' up the old eagle—when the volunteers went to Mexico what'd they do? When they saw anything good to eat they et it; when they saw anything fit to drink they drank it; and when they got sick they said their general was no good and wrote straight home to their Congressmen to have him dismissed. One of my men came growlin' to me at Jalapa and says: 'That comp'ny of Ohioans over there's eatin' all the fruit they want to.' 'Are they?' says I. 'You go ask 'em how many they've got on their sick-list.' He came back and says: 'Thirty per cent.' 'Very good,' says I, 'we've got five

THE VAGABOND

per cent. We'll draw lots for the other twenty-five and we'll leave 'em behind right off to fill up on orcottas and such, and we'll know just where we stand.'

"Ninety per cent. of my men, barring killed and wounded, stormed the heights of Chapultepec and twenty per cent. of that Ohio regiment; and when I seen how that little band of volunteers handled their bayonets, as unconcerned as if they was soup spoons, sir, and they were worried lest they shouldn't get their share, it near broke my heart to think what the others was missin'. Yes, sir, I learned my lesson in the ranks and didn't forget it, either.

"Well, sir, if the soldier's a baby, what's the miner without any discipline? Words fail me, sir, to describe his infantile follies, on the one hand, or his magnificent possibilities when he's properly weaned and brought up, on the other. He'll eat what he sees; he'll lie down all sweat and let the cold wind blow on his back and say afterward it ain't no white man's country. And what will he cry for? Colic medicine, sir, colic medicine!

"That's the first thing. And the second, sir! What is it an American most craves when he is far away from home? I've seen the time, sir, when a piece for every man would have restored the *esprit de corps* of a regiment. Mother's pies! Mother's apple-pies! That's what they'll cry for when they're well enough not to want the medicine. And there you have the combination that will make a customer of every man on the Pacific coast—apple-pie and belly-ache medicine! Do you agree, sir?"

"It's a good thing you turned soldier," said Tim;

THE VAGABOND

"a good thing for John Jacob Astor. We'll take our mine with us. But you'll have to post me up on the medicine. About the only colic medicine I knew when I was a boy was to roll on a barrel. That helped a lot, especially if your shirt worked up under your arms and there was plenty of slivers."

"The barrels are too bulky to carry, sir, and the little bottles won't take long at a New York drug store."

Tim, overjoyed at playing a part, set about canvassing the country-side for dried apples, and the Captain turned to the final preparations for the departure of his company, a matter easy to him from his long experience in army transport, and of never-failing interest to the Vagabond, who was initiated into the art that conceals art in this as in every other occupation.

"You do know one thing so well," he told "Father Bob," as he now called the Captain by the Captain's request. "It's just what I want to do. I want to know how to take gold out of mines. That will be my work. For fun I want to climb mountains and draw pictures. Oh, Captain, I'm so happy, so happy! In the morning I rub my eyes to make sure I'm not dreaming it. At night the last thing I think is, 'I certainly am going around the Horn on the Natty Nancy, Captain Jabez Goodrich.'" He always added the skipper's name, which seemed an essential part of the rigmarole.

When the three partners reached New York and they were making their final purchases, his consisted solely of a book on mining and metallurgy and plenty of paper and pencils. His thoughts were all for the ship and not ashore. Once aboard he preferred to stay.

THE VAGABOND

"It's too close and too thick," he said, nodding toward the city. "I'd like to climb the Palisades, though, if I wasn't so sure that I would see much bigger precipices. Now I'm on the ship I'll stick. I can't help feeling it's almost too good to be true. We're really going, aren't we? Around the Horn to the Rocky Mountains?"

He was sure he had never seen anything so clean as the Natty Nancy. He told Captain Goodrich so, and then and there the Captain became his friend.

The Captain was worthy of his vessel. For forty-five years his keen eye had scanned the seas of the world. In the story of his life you might read that of the wooden-walled marine, which was the glory of a nation's youth, already approaching its decline. Time had not made his temper softer, his sight duller to spots on the deck, or diminished his energy. It was more interesting to sup in the Captain's cabin as his guest than at a hotel, and when the Vagabond crawled into the little bunk that was to be his for the voyage his last thoughts were:

"It looks as if it really was *not* too good to be true. If anything is going to happen, it must happen before to-morrow noon. Oh, I wish it was to-morrow noon, now—then I'd be certain!"

Ten was the hour set for sailing, and by eight the soldiers were on board, the last of the cargo was secure, and everything waited on the Captain, who was ashore for his "papers" and a last word with the owners in dingy offices looking out on the field of masts which they sent forth to fetch and take the products of all lands. The Vagabond was silent and trembling with the terrible possibilities that his imagination sug-

THE VAGABOND

gested. It was too good, too good! Something would happen at the last moment! He watched every approaching figure on the pier with the fear that it might conceal some power which would suddenly turn his happiness into grief. So he was the first to see the Judge, whose measured walk and old-fashioned garb he recognized instantly.

"He's changed his mind," he thought. "He's not going to let me stay."

His first impulse was to hide; his next to fly to Father Bob, who was forward with Tim. But he understood the Captain's principles well enough to know that he would not take him against his uncle's will. So he met the Judge at the gangway defiantly, full armed with his rights and the boyish arguments he proposed to use. He whistled and forced his lips apart in a smile, and the Judge was smiling, too, quite naturally.

"Well, Billy, how do you like it by now?" he asked.

Billy! The Judge had always called him William before—and he hated William.

"I love it!" he replied. "Have you come to take me away? 'Cause if you have——"

The Judge laughed boisterously. The Vagabond had not known him to laugh aloud before and his suspicions ran higher.

"Did you think I'd go back on my word?"

"I didn't think. I was just *scared* you might."

The Judge laughed again, but not so heartily; for underneath his amusement he was asking himself why he should be regarded as an ogre.

"Well, you needn't worry any further on that

THE VAGABOND

score. I hope you do not mind my coming to say good-by and to bring you this parcel? Felicia has sent you a Bible, and I've added a little sketch-book. I thought maybe you'd like to make some pictures of people you see and send them back to me. I believe it will be little trouble for you to make them and they will give me a great deal of pleasure."

The element of constraint in the Judge's speech was due to his increased conviction that he was the boy's debtor for a liberalizing influence as the result of their brief association, and, moreover, to the injustice he had done him by never once having offered the olive branch to his dead brother.

"Thank you, sir. I will fill it full of soldiers and mountains and everything I see."

"And I have put in a few plays of Shakespeare. You ought to like *Prince Hal* and 'The Tempest,' I should say. 'Julius Cæsar' is my favorite, of course. The Bible and Shakespeare—they are a liberal education!"

This was the limit of the Judge's advice. He remained chatting in his deliberate way until it was time to cast off; and the last that those aboard, as the Natty Nancy, all trim and taut and fresh as a young housewife going to market, passed out into the river, saw of him was his fluttering handkerchief waved in farewell. In stately ease the good ship rounded Castle William, which alone with Castle Garden, Trinity and St. Paul's, of the surroundings of New York Bay of '49, remain the same, and on through the Narrows, where she spread her wings for her long sail. The Vagabond was awed and silent until the dim line

THE VAGABOND

of the Highlands melted into the clouds. Then he seized Tim's hand in his and cried:

"It isn't too good! It's true! It's true! Nothing can stop us now, can there?"

His next act was to unpack the Judge's parcel and begin work on that sketch-book. Before he was a week out he had it full, all except two leaves. These he reserved for the letter which he was to mail at Rio Janeiro—a letter which was a great credit to him, we'll agree. He began it with "Dear Uncle" instead of "Dear Judge":

"I did not like you a bit at first. Now I do like you a lot and I write to tell you so just as soon as I know it myself. You tried to be very good all the time, but you see you did not understand how to be good to *me*. I am such a queer little cuss, as Jim Rawkins said. I am afraid I was dreadfully sassy to you. Honest, I did not mean to be. I only just said what I thought. I can't do any other way, so please forgive me. I mean, you did not understand until you let me go. Oh, I cannot find any words big enough to thank you. I thank you like a little bird would when you let him out of his cage to fly away. His keeper may be a very, very good man and feed that little bird very well and teach him tricks; but that little bird would rather be in the air and free and fly as high as it wants to and get its own worms, which would be all the sweeter, and nestle in the crotch of a limb when it rained, which would be much more comfortable than any house.

"I hope you will like my pictures. There are a good many of Barney, the boatswain. Barney has

THE VAGABOND

taught me how to splice ropes. He has been on ships all his life and has been on a whaler, too. I don't dare say just how big that whale was that broke two boats all into flinders before he harpooned him in the Sea of Okotsk, because, you see, the length of the whale is never the same. Not that Barney means anything untruthful, only his estimate is different, I guess, every time he tells the story. Barney has a big red nose. The sailors say he got it by drinking too much grog. Barney says he got it by hard work and long hours on the roaring main. There is no doubt but he has done the hard work. I guess, though, if he hadn't done it he would have that red nose just the same. When I asked him what he thought of Robinson Crusoe he said Robinson was a landlubber who did not know the first thing about building boats. I told him the story of 'The Tempest,' and he said he liked the old man in it because he was such a growler, and by rights he ought to be a sailor. When I asked Barney if he was not a good deal of a critic, he said of course; what was the object of being a sailor if he was not. He told me a story of a crew once that growled so much their captain told them he would sign them on again at seventeen dollars a month and no growl or fifteen dollars and growl. Barney said they told the old pirate that he could never bribe an American sailor out of his rights, and they would take the fifteen dollars and growl, of course. I guess Barney likes to show off before a boy that has never been to sea before. I am willing.

"I think that if there were no mountain ranges I should like to be a sailor. The sea is a cradle that rocks you to sleep at night, and by day it is always

THE VAGABOND

moving. When I say that to Tim, though, he just looks at me. Tim said when he threw up his boots that he thought he would feel better if he could throw up the keel of the ship; but he finds that he does not. Father Bob is not sea-sick at all. It makes him very proud to walk up and down before his men with his dinner sitting as easy on his stomach as the cargo in the hold. 'If I'd been sea-sick, sir,' he said, 'I would never have shown myself before my men. I would have stayed in my bunk, sir.' I guess, though, that the soldiers were so sick themselves they could not have told whether their Captain was sick or not. The sailors laugh at the soldiers a good deal. 'Thought you was not going to have anything to do except eat aboard, you loafers!' they say; 'eating is about enough, ain't it?'

"The sailors always have something to do. When there is not something to take up or put down, there is something to mend. To hear them growl about how hard they had to work you would think they were going to quit there and then. When the Captain speaks, though, they fly. At first, I thought the Captain did not have any fun in him. He has, only it is all underneath. I asked him if he thought that Samson, being so big and strong, could have caught those foxes. 'Didn't the whale swallow Jonah?' he said. That was no answer at all, I thought. Next day I asked him again. 'Didn't the whale swallow Jonah?' he said, and dropped his eyelid.

"We have had all kinds of weather. One day we were becalmed. When anybody talked on board it seemed as if you could hear him clear to the end of the world. It was just as if all the world had wilted.

THE VAGABOND

We did not move an inch. Would we ever move again? You could look and look at the sea and sky and see no reason why we should. It seemed as if we had been where we were forever. It made me think of the rows of books in your law-office. Nobody was happy except Tim. He said he liked to hear me talk about its being calm forever. Then a little breeze began to puff out the sails, and in a few hours the ocean that had been asleep woke up and laughed with little waves and everybody was happy—even the sailors, who were all tired out growling over no work. The next day it did not seem possible it was the same sea. We had a storm, a real storm like you read about. I won't try to describe that. It was as if the sea was a great angry animal and was trying to shake off our little ship. It takes a storm to make you know what a great man Captain Goodrich is.

“Tell Miss Felicia that I read her Bible hard. I hope she didn't think me ungrateful. She is very, very good. It would make her happy to hear Captain Herrick read the Bible on Sunday to the soldiers. He reads very well. He says he is no preacher, but there is the book and he has the power of speech, and there is no chaplain.

“We are all so well that I nearly forgot to mention our health. I am so well I would not mind if it stormed all the time. My appetite! Why, it's too big for my stomach. I have it just the same, no matter how full I am. Father Bob says that next time he takes a ten-year-old boy far he is going to ballast him so there will not be quite as much room for food.

“You have made me the happiest boy in the world

THE VAGABOND

by letting me go. And please don't call me William any more.

"Your Loving Nephew,

"BILLY.

"P. S.—There is a good deal more about Barney than I thought there was when I come to read this letter through. Only I thought when our talks were so solemn you would like to hear about Barney, and I think Barney a good man and also funny. Besides, there is nothing sad aboard the Natty Nancy except Tim, and I do wish Tim was not sea-sick."

It was, indeed, not the smooth days with the long swell, but the rough ones that were the Vagabond's delight. Then he must have his head above the deck, matting his sandy hair with salt while he tossed the mop back in glee as the spray shot over the deck. Once when the angry short seas slapped the Natty Nancy, who shuddered with the blow and then slapped them back defiantly, he was missed from the companion-way just after a green ridge had swept the deck. Everyone, even the sea-sick Tim, rushed from below. Barney pressed them back as he pointed forward. There, in the bow, protected by the rail, lay the Vagabond, holding fast to the anchor. After the wave had broken against the sturdy Maine oak and passed on in tumult and fury, up came the sandy head to peep over at the abyss which it left, while the ship glided downward softly, as if judging in a moment of calm the might of another approaching monster. Barney went for him, but had to return with orders from "your superior, Captain Herrick," before his request was heeded.

THE VAGABOND

"Only one thing could be finer, and that's climbing a mountain," said the Vagabond, gayly. "I forgot there was any ship. It was just myself. I was meeting every one of them and driving them back and wagging my finger for the others to come on. Oh, it's much better than *amo*, *amas*, *amat*, or tricking policemen!"

XII

TO THE RAINBOW'S END

Captain Goodrich's face a down-Easter smile above his salty gray whiskers, not a case of sickness aboard, not a spar missing, the Natty Nancy dropped anchor in the Golden Gate, one hundred and sixty-three days out from New York. In the week following their arrival, our travellers had passed the length of that string of tents and shacks that had been thrown up on the beach in a nightmare of the sleepy Spanish priests, who half expected to awaken some morning and find the strange, insanely energetic beings, with piping oaths and hurry orders, and all their structures vanished from the beach. They had seen frowsy men toss buckskin bags as carelessly upon unplanned counters as if the contents had been brown instead of gleaming yellow; they had heard the talk of dollars to the pan intermixed with the fate of jackpots and sighs for home; they had poked their sniffing noses into the odor of rank tobacco and ranker perspiration in the buildings where the product of great luck at the mines was exchanged overnight for a headache.

The fulfilment of his prophecy was more gratifying than his share of the profits to Father Bob when he sold the dried apples and the colic medicine for a sum that needed no exaggeration to seem preposterous to Eastern credulity. With his share of the profits

THE VAGABOND

expended in an outfit, Tim set off on a prospecting tour, whose net result was only to enrich his imagination. The Vagabond was a vagabond no more. He had agreed to obey the Captain's orders, and obey them he did by being at the Post and thumbing the book on mining and metallurgy, which he already knew by heart, and seeking knowledge of his hobby in every possible way. He was not unhappy, and yet he was not quite happy. He was a boy keeping an agreement in all good faith, and awaiting the promised time when he should make a tour with Tim as a vacation, and, in the end, when he was seventeen and of age, might do as he pleased. The Captain often thought of letting him go with Tim altogether, but could not bring himself to the parting.

Was it the boy's wistfulness and yet philosophical composure under restraint? Was it the inactivity of the Post while the greatest of dramas was being enacted in the field? It matters little for our purpose. It is only essential that, within a year after their arrival, a board, at his own request, retired the Captain from the army. Therefore, the three again united, the old soldier (an expert in war, a baby in civil affairs), the exaggerative, great-hearted Tim, and a happy boy of parts set forth to encounter the wind-mills in the year A.D. 1850. But the Vagabond was not yet to climb a high mountain and hunt for gold on his own account. He must be content to look at the Sierras in the distance and follow the creek beds whose windings were the courses of the placer hunter's fortune.

An observing miner expressed a salient truth of the hour when he said that the ole sojer had the best gol-

THE VAGABOND

darned outfit he'd ever seen, but that didn't mean he'd have any better luck than any other goldarned galoot. Within that same six months that the Captain and Tim climbed over divides and panned creek sands to a total of \$121.32, more than one plain "cuss," who had started without a week's rations in sight, proceeded, with a swagger and bulging pockets, dropping wise saws by the way, toward 'Frisco.

Finally, the Captain found a "lead" in a creek bottom. His project for working it required the extension of his partnership to include twenty men who should stake twenty claims in a block, and the building of a wing dam to divert the current. In three months the dam was completed. On the first day they took out a thousand dollars. On the second day it broke, and the men swore by a good many things at their luck, and then swore again after the reaction from their despair by a good many things that they would rebuild the dam.

The close of every day put a notch on the slender stick of each worker's patience that nearly severed it; still they kept on until once more the creek bed was a strand of red mud at their feet. It yielded a few hundred dollars more before the lead stopped as suddenly as a stable footing at the edge of a precipice. They ran up and down panning, like hounds that had lost the scent, and came stock still, with a growl of anger, before the man who had led them into the enterprise. For a moment it looked as if they might lay hands on him. All his years of service, all his success on the plains, where sheer force of character had brought him out of difficulties, now stood him in stead. He did not think of argument and explanation. He

THE VAGABOND

met their anger as rigidly as he would a charge. He said that if there were men among them who could take their medicine, let them come to his support. If not, he preferred to face the "pack" alone. One by one they stepped to his side, until a minority went away snarling.

If his figure was as rigid, his face as calm, as ever, in his heart, for the first time, he felt the contraction of dismay. His last dollar was gone. He began to realize the folly of a man of his years resigning from the army in order to gratify a boy's whim.

That afternoon Tim took Billy up on the hill-side above the cabins, and together they seated themselves in the shade.

"There's no worry for myself," Tim said. "When everybody out here wants to make a fortune for himself by day after to-morrow at the latest, it's easy enough for me to make a living by working for wages. But that grand old man! It's on account of us that he's not back there parading his company. And you, Billy! This isn't any place for you, the way I see things now. Why, the Judge meant to send you to college! Whatever possessed us to take you away I don't know; your smile, I guess. Now, Billy, honest Injun, don't you think you ought to go back and get an education?"

"And be a quitter? And never find my mine?" Billy gasped. Then he smiled and tried to whistle, as Tim had bidden him long ago.

"You promised the Captain to obey him," Tim managed to say, in face of that smile and that whistle.

"Yes," Billy admitted, pulling out the words as if they were aching teeth, "yes, I did."

THE VAGABOND

"And there's another thing. The Judge said two years out here wouldn't put you back much, and he gave me five hundred dollars to keep in secret to send you home."

"The Judge did that!" exclaimed Billy in amazement. "He did that without talking about it! Oh, I'm ashamed of myself for all I thought about him! But I couldn't face him if I failed." (And the girl—how could he find her? What excuse could he make for himself to her?) "I'd rather tramp with a pack and skillet forever than go back poor. Oh, I can't, I can't go till I climb my mountain and find my mine. That's what I came for, and, Tim, I've—I've thought I've been pretty patient waiting on you grown folks. Don't advise Father Bob to send me back, will you?"

Tim turned his face away rather than look into the pleading eyes of the Vagabond.

"I'll think it over," he said, and led the way back to the cabin, where supper was waiting.

The Vagabond watched his two comrades preparing their packs; he heard them lay out the routes which they were to take to-morrow, going as far as their rations would carry them; he received their orders about keeping house meekly enough to have excited suspicion; he wrapped himself in his blanket for the night when they did. When heavy breathing told him that they were well settled in slumber, he noiselessly slipped into his boots, breeches, and jacket. Outside in the moonlight he scribbled a note begging Tim's pardon for taking his pack, expressing his sense of responsibility for their plight and his confidence that he could find gold, and praying them not to worry, as he would return safe and sound.

THE VAGABOND

As young and old guardians read these words, they looked into each other's eyes and understood. The highest mountain in sight, whose peak was cloaked in snow, he had called his own and named The Topper. In his moments of day-dreaming they had heard him say, "There's gold in The Topper, I'm sure. I'll climb up and find it some day." They thought that, with only a boy's glimmer of the difficulties, he would start to ascend it and keep on with inborn stubbornness until his food was gone and return was impossible. Breakfastless, they started in pursuit by different routes. Everyone in the camp joined, until darkness sent them back without news. A week and more had passed, when Tim Booker, hatless, coatless, packless, came down the mountain-side.

"Where is he?" he cried. "Is he all right? My boy Billy, is he all right? I was dying up there and somebody whispered to me that he was."

One man of the group, known as Missouri Dan, Tim's sole rival in the gentle art, was never taken unawares.

"Yaas," he drawled. "Ben here two days. Stumbled into Pete Rooney's cabin over thar, clean done up."

"Thank God! I'll——"

"Now, wait a minit, Tim. We didn't move him. Doctor's jest come up from Bubble Canyon. Says our hoss sense saved his life. He's jest 'twixt an' 'tween with fever. Any excitement'd kill him. As fer you—why, at the sight of his old friend Tim Booker there'd be a sob an' 'twould all be over."

So they put Tim to bed in his own cabin, where he sank into the sleep of exhaustion; and a miner who

THE VAGABOND

had the last drop o' the cratur remaining in camp shared it with Missouri Dan, while the others present smacked their lips with such a whip to the imagination that they almost tasted the reality denied them.

After thirty-six hours Tim awakened with the start of one who has overslept an appointment.

"He said he'd be back in ten days! This is the tenth!" he said.

"Got back in eight, Tim. He's over in Pete Rooney's cabin," Missouri Dan explained.

"I remember!" Tim rose to the edge of the bed. "So you said. I'll go and see him."

"Sorry, Tim. There's ben a tur'ble storm up in the mount'ns. Nuff snow's fell on the Sierrys to bury a whole lot of them little European nations. It's set the boy back a leetle. He'll get well, all right, 'less he's excited by seeing some near an' dear friend. The thing fer you to do, Tim, is to lay down agin an' rest easy, whilst we rustle some broth so you'll be well's soon's Billy is."

Tim smiled as the Vagabond had seen him smile in the corn-row when he lighted his pipe and contemplated the world with charitable cynicism.

"You're foolin' me!" he cried, suddenly.

Dodging here, striking there, he ran to Pete Rooney's cabin. The door was open; no one was inside.

He turned toward the still, magnificent heights in their aprons of snow, now gleaming under the sun of a day always seeming fairer (because it follows a storm) than its followers, which may be equally fair. He cast a glance at the men, who were watching to see what effect the truth would have upon him, and with

THE VAGABOND

weak, uncertain footsteps and flashing eye started up the hill-side.

"Quick, now, another good man an' some grub!" cried Missouri Dan. "He'll tire out perty soon; then we'll bring him back. Gawd! The old man an' the boy are froze stiff up thar long ago, an' our duty's to the living."

XIII

WHICH IS PLACER, NOT QUARTZ

The Captain and Tim did not understand any better than most grown people where a boy's belief ends and his fancy begins. Youthful discretion and recklessness go hand in hand, else many more masculine necks would be broken before their time. However much the Vagabond wanted to reach the summit of The Topper, he dismissed it as entirely secondary to the need of funds. In practice, he had not the slightest idea of wading in the snow that separated the dirt from easy panning. Where the white blanket met the red of turf and the green of trees and the gray of rock—this was his path.

From dawn till darkness overtook him he travelled, and then he built a fire, and lying close to it slept till the cold awakened him, when he rebuilt it and began cooking his breakfast. He was infinitely happy, happier even than he had imagined he would be, the bounding zest of adventure forbidding fatigue, while at every favorable place he panned for colors. He was surprised to find how far away The Topper was, and how short a distance, on account of obstacles, he made each day; and yet he took this as a part of the game, as the price of freedom. On the seventh day, just after he had thrown his pack across a torrent and

THE VAGABOND

was about to leap over it himself, a yellow pebble in the bank of the gorge attracted him with the suddenness of a flash of light at night. A bound carried him to the other side. He looked again. The speck still gleamed yellow from the new point of view, answering to the prospector's test for gold, and a minute later he knew that he had found a "pocket," which is every placer miner's ambition.

Before man came upon the earth to force the animals to give him room; before the Pyramids were built; while the men of nations long dead lobbied and traded and rose early and gave false witness for a little gain; under countless generations of rulers, The Topper, in the superb hazard of nature, had nestled in its lap this present for a boy who, whatever his faults, was not a "quitter." Yet in the California of that day, when a prospector who had sought year in and year out for treasure in vain, uncovered a fortune by kicking up the turf in a wayside argument, the fact was in nowise remarkable.

The Vagabond looked up at the white peak of The Topper and then down at the valley stretching away in tree-studded greens and browns toward the Pacific. He felt the joy and the power of being alone with his treasure where no human being had ever trod before. In a grove well down toward the plain was the spot where the girl should be waiting for him with her apron ready to receive the nuggets. All in play, he had a mind to imagine her actually there and to make the journey to her bower.

But he had not yet climbed the mountain which was down in his calendar as preceding the discovery of his mine. And his mine was only placer. It was

THE VAGABOND

quartz that he wanted; quartz that required the knowledge in his mining and metallurgy book. All that he had found was the funds to tide his friends over their emergency. It occurred to him that his "pocket" would do them no good or him either unless he reached them with the news. The butterfly captured, how far was the hunter from home? He went back to examine his pack, as if he did not know already the state of his larder. At sight of that handful of beans and a thin strip of bacon he had a spasm of demoralization. He found himself crying out to Tim and the Captain in terror. The rocks echoed back his words, and seemed to add the refrain, "What is the use of gold to a starving boy?" Then he threw back his head, the blue of his eyes became as calm as the blue of the sky; he smiled and whistled.

"It's a good thing I found it as soon as I did," he thought, "or I'd kept right on going, maybe. Perhaps there's some place nearer than our camp."

He leapt up with the hope of his words. Climbing to the highest point, a point whence you may ride in a parlor car to San Francisco in a few hours to-day, with an unobstructed view he strained his vision for the sight of some human habitation. Not so much as a curl of smoke rose on the clear, still air.

"The only sure way is the way I came," he said. "I know that," he added, confidently, as if he were long skilled in woodcraft. "I've two meals and it took seven days to come." His effort to whistle was attenuated, but successful enough to make him feel better. "I haven't much to carry and I won't stop to prospect. I ought to make it back in three days. I can, and there's a full moon—a full moon!" He

THE VAGABOND

whistled evenly and determinedly as he began to retrace his steps.

Though he told himself that he was certain of his route, at times he palpitated with fear that he was not. The next morning he stopped long enough to cook his provender, of which he ate a carefully separated half; the rest he was to eat cold on the way. Feeling not only the pangs of hunger but also that uncertainty of physical movement which a dizzy brain increases, he decided that he must keep his legs going, going, going; for if he once allowed them to stop they would never start again. If he stumbled and fell, he rubbed his eyes instead of his shins and tried to whistle. On the night of the third day he was still scrambling on. In three or four hours he knew, or thought he knew, by the landmarks, that he would be in the cabin, and the roaring in his head, he told himself, was only a joyful humming.

Nature stepped in between him and his goal. A stillness broken by no quivering leaf brought the heavens in silence pressing toward the earth. The crackle of twigs, the scraping of his soles on the rocks, seemed to come from the footsteps of some distant person. Growing dimmer, gradually the stars were blotted out. A blinding swirl brought a white, dense night as the warning of the approach of human powerlessness. The heavens opened, with the wind in havoc, to fling their downpour in a carpet far below the old line where melting snow met turf. The shimmering of light through driven flakes showed the Vagabond an opening under a great mass of stone where no gust had yet penetrated. This rock in its cold blue and gray tints was as radiant of welcome as ever was a

THE VAGABOND

shaded bench of an inn garden to a dusty traveller. As he launched toward it, wet and blinded, wallowing to his hips, he became conscious of another presence in this area of despair. He saw it stumble and fall, and plunged to its side.

"Come, Father Bob! Come, Captain, Captain!" he begged.

A flush of strength came back to the old man; enough, with the boy's help, to bring them to that succoring black hole. There, in the forced twilight, while the storm was sweeping by as harmlessly as the swashing waves past a steamer's closed port-holes, the Vagabond unloosened the belt of his beloved leader, threw his own coat over him, and rubbed his hands and pounded his legs. Then he saw that on some other occasion when the wind had been in the opposite direction it had blown leaves and twigs into the cave. As hastily as he could make it, he had a fire going.

"I was coming back on the other side of the divide," the Captain whispered, "and I was crossing over about opposite our camp. At any rate, I thought I was—yes, I thought I was. Yes, Captain Robert Herrick, U. S. A., you have lost your way. Yes, they may say I have lost my way, but no man can say that I'm afraid. I never did want to die propped up on pillows with a pile of medicine bottles at my elbow and folks looking on to hear the curtain rung down with the death-rattle. I—you vagabond, you, with your freckled face and your head in the air, when it clears you make west for the edge of the snow, and keep going till you strike a creek bed and follow it down stream. Don't be afraid to drink water. That will

THE VAGABOND

keep you awake and stop the faintness if it does make you sick afterward—and you follow the stream and you're bound to find human beings."

"We aren't lost! We aren't! I know we aren't!" the Vagabond cried, and he shook the Captain with all his might. "You remember that big pine that stands all alone—the one the landslide didn't get and with the finger pointing toward The Topper? Well, I saw that just before it got so dark I couldn't see anything."

The shaking and the fire began to bring the blood back into the Captain's limbs.

"You did, sir," he said, "and you're punching me up! Why, I'm the quitter! Yes, sir, I'm the quitter now, and—why, you've built a fire! Why, we're just as cosey here as bugs in a rug. We'll eat snow and imagine it's the whites of eggs, and we'll chew a twig and that'll be our bacon, sir."

"Oh, Father Bob!" was all the Vagabond could say at first, so full was he at the sight of his leader returning to his militant self. "That isn't all," he added. "You needn't worry now. See what I've found!" He drew the nuggets from his pocket.

The Captain fondled them, his eyesight growing better in the warmth of their glow.

"A child shall lead them!" he whispered, and soon fell asleep.

The Vagabond drew himself away from the soporific warmth and looked out at the storm away from the hypnotic flame, which he fed with eyes averted. He thought that the fire should be kept going for the Captain's sake; he feared, for reasons less manifest than instinctive, to allow himself to go to

THE VAGABOND

sleep. Now a million claws seemed pulling at his stomach, and then a wave of nausea would sweep over him. He crawled to the gate-way of snow forming across the mouth of the cave. After he had eaten a handful and put a handful on the back of his neck, which he found reviving, a shadow fluttered out of the flaky screen and there landed at his feet a broken-winged partridge. He seized the ball of damp feathers and held it tight. Here was food come out of the heavens. Father Bob should have broth and meat when he awoke. Then he felt the beating of the frightened bird's heart against his own.

"You came in here to save your life, too, didn't you?" he said. All the sympathy he had for the hunted welled up in his throat. "You've made a hard fight, too, just as hard as we have. I wish you hadn't that broken wing. I—I can't!" By shouts and shakings he awakened the Captain. "There's a meal, Father Bob, if—if you can kill it." He turned away and heard the death-flaps of the bird with a shudder.

When the storm cleared the morning after, they were the stronger for the sustenance.

"Now, sir, once we're out of this we'll follow a creek bed. That's the safe way," said the Captain, who had little confidence in the Vagabond's sense of their position.

When at last they had clambered nearly to the edge of the snow line, the Vagabond, his face suffused with the pleasure of surprising the Captain with the ease of their task, now pointed to the giant tree which had been one of the landmarks of their surroundings since they began building the dam. A few minutes later, on the hill-side overlooking the camp, they met the

THE VAGABOND .

hatless, coatless, wild-eyed Tim Booker. As he looked at his haggard friends, Billy realized the measure of his responsibility for the hardships they had endured.

"I didn't think you'd follow. I said I'd return all right. Oh, I'll pay you back for all this. It's better than any mine to have two such partners. Oh, I'm so glad, even if it isn't quartz, that there is enough so you won't have to worry while you rest and get well!"

PART II

XIV

ENTER JIMMY POOL

In January of 1861 two of the passengers on a steamer due to depart from San Francisco for the Isthmus in half an hour were becoming anxious because the third member of their party had not yet appeared. Repeating assurances to each other, they nevertheless strained their eyes at the last tug approaching from shore, as earnestly as if faces were actually recognizable a thousand yards away.

The tufts of hair in front of Captain Herrick's ears were pure white now. Otherwise, ten years had scarcely changed him. He was as erect as ever. His flesh had nothing of the tinge of old age; the same bronze skin tightly drawn over his high cheek-bones numbered a few more wrinkles which had been formed under influences softer than those of the drill-ground, and his eyes shone out of their criss-crossed citadel with more than keenness and good-humor—with the happiness and prosperity due to his investment in a runaway boy.

Tim Booker had thickened until his great height was more like a pillar than a pole. A long beard of straw-bleached color added to the effect of primi-

THE VAGABOND

tive strength. It seemed as if the titanic hand which grasped the rail was larger; certainly it was stronger and accordingly more dangerous to an adversary, as two or three could testify. Even as his strength had grown, thanks to his vocation, so his imagination had grown, thanks to his associations. While he was still the incarnation of truth when his eye twinkled, under the favoring conditions of the California of that day he had practised his precept that it was stingy to pass a camp lie along without improving it, until experience had made him a past master of the art of harmless fiction. Between the two there was the irrevocable bond of friendship often made by parts that find their wanting qualities in each other.

"A thousand oceans wouldn't keep him," said Tim. "He's found some other cripple or widow that he's going to take back. He's there on the tug, all right."

So he was, but his companion was not of either type that Tim had mentioned. The young man who preceded the Vagabond up the gangway was lean and wabbly as a porpoise-hide shoe-string, and time was to prove that he was as enduring.

"Now, no jinks! You're going with us and there's an end of it, Jimmy Pool," said the Vagabond, when they set foot on deck.

Jimmy dropped languidly against the rail.

"I suppose I might as well stay now that we've got as far as we have," he drawled in reply; and the Vagabond made haste to the purser's side.

"You've got me down for ten tickets; Mrs. Dowling, Tom Smith"—he read off from a card the

THE VAGABOND

names of those that his bounty was sending back to their relatives in the East. "And now I want still another."

When the purser stated unequivocally that he had not a berth left, the Vagabond rejoined:

"Who wants a berth? Passage, that's all. Who wants a stuffy berth on the Pacific when he can sleep on deck under the stars?"

The ticket bought, he brought the languid figure away from the rail to introduce him to Father Bob and Tim.

"This is Jimmy Pool," he began; then stopped, for Jimmy had put his heels together and, every fibre in his body stiffening, was an automaton, saluting his former officer.

"So you had the gold fever, too, Pool," said the Captain.

"Yes, sir. That reminds me," Jimmy drawled, "that we're both plain 'cits' now." Whereupon, Jimmy melted back into ennui and leaned against the nearest stable object.

"He was a good soldier, I'll warrant," the Vagabond added, to the Captain.

"As good as they make, sir."

"I knew it, though I've known Jimmy only two hours. The first thing I heard of him did him credit enough. He and his partner Tompkins had got together a good bag of dust apiece and were going home. Tompkins was returning to marry his sweetheart and bring her back to the coast; Jimmy was returning to see his old mother. Tompkins when he reached 'Frisco thought he hadn't quite enough. So he put a few checks on roulette in the hope of getting more

THE VAGABOND

and kept on doing this until he hadn't a cent left. Then Jimmy gave Tompkins his share and saw him aboard ship.

"Now for the second—that was when I saw Jimmy first. He was leaning against something or other—except he's doing something great, Jimmy always is, as you can see for yourself—when a worthy named Wilks, one of the worst of his breed in 'Frisco, rushed up to him and put a muzzle fairly in his face. 'I'm going to kill you, d—n you!' Wilks said. Jimmy never so much as straightened his knee-joint. 'Is that gun a Smith & Wesson or a Colt?' he asked, as if it was a case of taking cake or pie. Wilks was dumfounded by the coolness of the man. He looked as if it would ease his conscience a little if Jimmy would either tremble and whine or at least stand up stiff to be shot. When he recovered from his surprise he said, 'Say your prayers, you——,' and he shoved the muzzle closer to Jimmy's face. 'There's no need of hurrying about it,' Jimmy said; 'I haven't got any gun and you have the drop on me, and I guess you can hit me at that range.'

"And Jimmy talked more in his quiet way, and the next thing we knew his hand flew up and the revolver went into the air; and before we had taken stock of that event, Wilks was on the pavement. Jimmy picked up the revolver and took out the cartridges and handed it back to Wilks, with this gentle advice: 'You don't appear to know when to use them, so you're just as well off without them.' It was the coolest thing a fellow who never sees any more of 'Frisco than I do ever saw, and Jimmy Pool had my heart and hand from that moment."

THE VAGABOND

The hero himself looked dreamily out to sea as if he were passing the compliment on to the fishes.

"And when you happen on such a man, in my opinion, Father Bob, the only thing to do is to enlist him. I think we'll find Jimmy useful at the mine when we come back. Besides, his life wouldn't be safe in 'Frisco now. Wilks will take his first chance on a dark night to put a bullet in his back."

"What! I didn't think of that. It looks as if I was sneaking."

Jimmy's languid parts sprang into action. He pushed through the people on the deck toward the gangway with the agility of a cat. But the tug had already drawn off, the steamer was getting under way, and the Vagabond's detaining hand was on his shoulder.

"Well, I guess nobody'll think I'm afraid of Wilks, anyway," he said. "There's one thing I ought to tell you—I won't come back if there's a war between the States. I'd have to be in that. I don't know as your investment'll pay you very well."

The Vagabond put his hand on the former private's shoulder:

"Two hours ago I didn't know you, Jimmy Pool," he said. "On your looks and actions I liked you. I knew just how you felt with your thoughts for months all quivering in the expectancy of going home. What is the cost of your fare beside the pleasure of your company? What has money to do with liking a man, anyway? I like you, I tell you, Jimmy Pool, and I hope I'll be half-way agreeable to you."

Jimmy shifted his weight from one leg to the other and made a compliment:

THE VAGABOND

"And you're my kind of a man, hat and boots and clothes and body in 'em and heart in body," he said, "and you played to my soft spot—my old mother."

With that, the Vagabond sought out the other passengers, "the widows and cripples," whom he was helping back to the East. Each was warned to keep his kindness a secret; for all the pleasure and all the reward a deed held for him was the doing. Lion-hearted, warm-hearted boy had become lion-hearted, warm-hearted man, sweetened by stern experience, softened by the love of his friends, dignified by power.

After the money from the "pocket" was expended, there had been ups and downs for the three fortune-hunters; and on one of the ups, at his behest, they had made a journey to the Sandwich Islands in satisfaction of his vagabondish wish to see a little more of the world.

When he was nineteen he had found the quartz of his heart's desire. This ledge called for the knowledge in his beloved mining and metallurgy book; in the course of time, by the application of skill and machinery, it would yield him a great fortune. His comrades would never want for funds again. To the Captain was assured a comfortable old age; to Tim a competence in exchange for the pleasure of the giant's love and companionship. For himself, he had the occupation of his choice, that of taking wealth out of the stubborn rock without trading or rubbing elbows in city streets. Yes, he was happy, infinitely happy in his gratitude to the Captain for having humored a boy's fancy and in having paid the Captain back materially and sentimentally.

And yet his ambition was not complete because of

THE VAGABOND

the glorious secret which was still entirely his own. The girl was as radiantly clear in his mind as the day after he had seen her. He nursed his fancy as one does some sweet absurdity that has the simulation of reality in day-dreams only so long as it is not shared with anyone else. He had learned as soon as the news was brought to the garrison of Captain Lanley's death and his daughter's journey to the Lanley plantation. Afterward, by artifice which did not reveal his personal interest, he ascertained, from time to time, that she had not changed her residence. Maturity had given him a subtler appreciation of the barrier of caste. He knew that they were not separated by distance alone. It was with thoughts of her that he had learned to dance on one of his visits to the Post; that he had studied the ways of Southern officers and their wives and imbibed the instinct of certain social forms which did not obtain in mining regions. He had met women, and pretty women, too, not only in the army but in the little circle of the city itself, and he found them toy figures beside the fair one of his imagery.

At the same time the contact with camp or town made him sceptical and miserable. How ridiculous, he thought then, that a small boy's liking for a small girl should be the controlling feature of a man's life; how ridiculous the stern realities of human society made the fancy that had been wine to his spirit. Return to the mine made him again the vagabond—made him joyous, made him *himself*, which is the best explanation of him—with his thoughts softly dwelling on possibilities.

Did she remember that odd little William whom

THE VAGABOND

she had christened Billy? Would the woman greet the man's story of the finding of a mine with the delight of the Vision for the boy's capture of a butterfly? For the thousandth time his imagination pictured her beauty in the bloom of twenty. He saw her half a head below his own height, with the frost of a winter's day in her words when dignity was required, with the freshness of a June morning for her friends, with the mole dimpling into her chin in her moments of great happiness and in bestowing honors. And her adorable hair! It must be long now and thick enough to make a great braid. Was it still of the color and sheen of the chestnut fresh from the burr? Yes, it was, in the moments when every man feels that hidden in some bower, far or near, is the feminine counterpart of his masculinity. Were her eyes still of the brown which could melt your whole being into them with their commendation or in their censure toss you into the gutter? Yes, they were, in the fancy of the wanderer who lay on the moss after the mid-day meal or looked into the camp-fire's embers or at the stars at night. Then, with a brush of his arm across his eyes, he saw the reality. Perhaps the dimple was gone, the mole prominent and bearded with scraggly hairs; perhaps she had the devil's own temper. If she were not already engaged to a scion of a neighboring plantation, her provincial nature would see in him merely a freckled, sandy-haired clod of a miner and a Northerner.

Moreover, why should he expect this part of his boyish dream to come true when the others had not? For he had found his first mine before he had climbed his mountain; and his quartz ledge was not in The

THE VAGABOND

Topper but in a ridge between two insignificant peaks. Yet the facts were true to the fancy in the main. Though she had changed, though he had changed, why should she not be true in the main? Rather than explode it with reality, he told himself, it were better to continue worshipping at the shrine of a beautiful fiction and wait for time to disabuse him of it and make him free.

Time had done nothing of the kind. The twelfth year of his absence found the ideal more firmly in his heart than the eleventh. The crushing of the rock in his ledge, the bags of gold which he sent to the mint, were for her. He was covetous only when he thought of her greeting the clean-up with the rapturous smile that had in nowise faded from his memory. If he made plans, far-reaching and upbuilding his power in the future, he liked to think that they looked toward a domain at her disposal. It was all out of keeping with his splendid manhood that he should be content with imagery alone. Only association, he concluded, could cure him of his idiosyncrasy; or else—the blood leapt in rhythm to his temples with the hope—turn his dream into verity. His going for machinery was, after all, an excuse. His real object was to feel the egoism-killing contact of a great city like New York. And then, if he was still ailing, he would call on her and be swept into the road with a stare. To his friends a vagabond and the possessor of a worn copy of Mining and Metallurgy whose teachings he had practised and expanded; to square-jawed men of affairs a calm, blue-eyed master of his property, to himself he was one who found his strength and inspiration in a piece of sentimental folly.

THE VAGABOND

"Of course the mole is bearded; of course you'll be disillusioned," said the little devils to him.

"No, it's not; no, you'll not. It is all coming true," he told himself when he rose glowing from his morning dip in a mountain-stream. "The mountain and the mine and the girl!"

XV.

IMPULSE BETRAYS A SECRET

When he had kept it so long, the Vagabond was surprised at himself for yielding his secret in an impulse. On the second day out, while he and Father Bob were sitting together, well apart from the other passengers, in a reminiscent mood, their first meeting was rehearsed again, point by point.

"What a fool they thought that old bach. was," said the Captain, "for adopting a vagabond, sir, that he didn't know anything about! That shows what poor judges we all are about other folks's affairs. You freckle-faced little cuss, you, you've renewed an old man's youth. And you've climbed your mountain and got your mine. Yes, sir, you've gratified all your ambitions, just as you said you would."

It was then, in the glow of filial love, on his lips to say that he had not—the greatest of all remained; but instead he poured out his gratitude in language more full if no more heart-felt than that of his boyhood. The Captain laid his hand on the Vagabond's knee, and patting it, said, fondly:

"And where you go Father Bob goes, don't he, as long as he is young enough to follow? Together we'll see the sights of Broadway and together we'll see Washington and together we'll go to Belmore and show Miss Felicia how this old savage, heathen, wild

THE VAGABOND

Indian—those were her words, by the Eternal, sir—brings up a boy. Together! That's all Father Bob asks, as long as he lives. Together!"

The old man's reference to his age, a note of sadness in his voice, his affection shining out of his moist eyes, the keen memory of his chivalrous belief in a boy's dream on the guarantee of that boy's word and a keener appreciation of obligation which manhood brought, made the Vagabond feel guilty at having kept a thing of such importance from his benefactor.

"Together! That's the way it has always been—except, there's one thing I would rather do alone. I have to call on a girl." Almost unconsciously he had let the fact slip.

"A girl!" gasped the Captain. "How in the devil—a girl!"

It was too late to draw back now; abruptly and characteristically the Vagabond told the whole truth.

"Yes, to be honest, a girl I'm in love with—or think I am!"

"A girl! Good God!" cried the Captain. "I never saw you shining up to any particular petticoat! Who, in thunder—who, in thunder, is she?" He sat bolt upright with a hand on each knee, searching the Vagabond's face with a drill-sergeant's stare.

"Do you remember little Miss Lanley who used to be at the Post?"

"Yes, sir. We called her little Miss General. But"—the Captain puffed out his cheeks in his amazement—"how in the devil? She hasn't been in California! You haven't been East! How in the devil can you be in love with a girl two thousand miles away?"

THE VAGABOND

"That's what I wonder. I don't even know that I am in love with her. I saw her for half an hour when I was a boy. It was she I came to see at the Post," he went on, carried into enthusiasm and full belief in his fancy. "It was she I climbed the mountain for; she I found the mine for. If it hadn't been for her I would never have seen you. I was asking the sentry about her when you spied me."

"And you never told me—never, never, sir!" retorted the Captain.

"No. I thought it would upset the argosy of my dreams. I thought it would make me seem ridiculous, and it has. I wish I hadn't told you. I am going to call on her; that's all."

"Ever written to her? Ever heard from her?"

"No. Probably she doesn't remember me. I'm simply going to call on her and tell her my story."

"Never told me! I knew it!" Father Bob proceeded, his wrath rising in contemplation of what had been denied him and what was in store for him, his jealousy fast making a fancy a courtship and a courtship a marriage. "I knew it! I knew a woman would come between us. Yes, sir, it's a woman that always does. Well, sir, hitch on and follow! Bob Herrick ain't been in one white man's, one greaser's, and five Injun wars, he ain't so old yet, that he can't bach. it by himself. How in the devil—how"—he rose and went pacing angrily along the deck.

On his part, the Vagabond gazed wonderingly out on the long, gently rolling swell that rocked the steamer on that warm day with the hand of a sleepy nurse-maid.

When reason took the place of indignation, the

THE VAGABOND

Captain saw how groundless was his alarm. This Billy was only a boyish man, even as he had been in some respects a mannish boy. My lady of Virginia would laugh at the miner and send his pride a-soaring. He who had seen so few women would see so many in New York that former predilections would melt on contemplating their object, if, finally, he went to her at all.

Changing his tack completely, he sailed back in the best of humor to crack a jest at the Vagabond's expense. Thereafter, whenever no one might overhear, he would snigger and whisper in the Vagabond's ear, "Girl!" or, "I met her for half an hour;" or, "She probably has a wart on her nose, now;" or, "You'll be in time to witness her marriage to a fire-eating secessionist." At first, the Vagabond would blush and flee. Later, he would smile and possibly add a soft, "Yes, Father Bob." If the Captain had any idea that he had applied a cure, he was disabused of it when, upon arriving in New York, they found that they were in time to see the inauguration, an opportunity which he advised they should not miss.

"Certainly I am in favor of it. It's on my way to call on the girl," said the Vagabond.

Jimmy Pool hurried away to his mother. Tim was only too glad to be left alone for the great splurge that he had long nursed in his perfervid imagination.

"I'm going to Newland Centre and get the best span of hosses in the country," he said. "I'm going to have gold-plated harness and wear a high hat and a watch-chain with links as big as your fist and a look like a foreign king, and drive up in front of Jim Rawkins's door and tell him I wouldn't mind buying his old farm if it wasn't so d—d small."

XVI

THE MISTS ON THE PLAIN

In half an hour Abraham Lincoln would be President of the United States. Meanwhile, the Senate talked, with its mind on the creeping hands of the Senate clock.

On the floor was the force and the simplicity of the Republic; the Southern members longing to hear the slap of the gauntlet at their feet; a part of the Northern members hoping that the new knight would throw it, and the rest spellbound by the crisis and half expecting some miracle to avert secession when they knew that the day of miracles was past—all, to a man, wondering what the great unknown quantity out of the West, already on his way to the Capitol, would do.

In the gallery, in contrast to the immobile, tired faces of a school-room full of the representatives of the passions, the cliques, the prejudices, and the great heart and great principles of thirty millions of people, were the colors of woman's garb in competitive show. In the diplomatic gallery facing the chair was a full panoply of medals and gold braid, most amazing and ridiculous to constituents from distant places; pates bald and skins wrinkled and pasty from the age and the dinners that go with diplomatic success, making a mask for the glistening front of a jew-

THE VAGABOND

eller's window. Even the Ministers were interested. They smiled in contemplation of the division of a nation which had imagined that it could remain intact without an hereditary ruler—all save the august Cossack, ever confident in the might of his acreage and ever casting his eye abroad for the discomfiture of England. Scattered here and there were the epaulets of our army and navy. On some of the officers their uniforms sat with the snug comfort of loyalty; on others, with the irksomeness of garments long out of style. But the face of no one showed more concern than that of curiosity. It was a fête, with the buzz of rambling comment looking down upon the supposed obsequies of a nation that had been fondly called heaven-born and indestructible.

In spectators' seats, which one of the California Senators had provided, were Father Bob and his ward, who felt the oppression of his "store clothes" in contrast to the display around him. In common with everyone, except those who blinked from the loss of a night's sleep through the dull proceedings of the floor, the Vagabond was scanning the sloping walls of faces for someone that he knew. Suddenly his gaze was caught and held fast by a party of five, whose State any Washingtonian of that day or any reader of fiction of this could have told at a glance.

Item, one proud old man of seventy-five, clasping the handle of his cane as he sat erect, Mr. Lanley; item, a woman of sixty, whom time had treated so kindly as fully to warrant her in reporting ten years less, Mrs. Bulwer; item, an army officer of thirty-five, looking as if he had seen more of the world than any

THE VAGABOND

of the others, Richard Bulwer; item, a young army officer, consciously handsome, with long black curls and a haughtiness that could quickly turn sullen, Jefferson Southbridge. His smiles were all for the fifth member of the party; her's for everybody, rippling with the joy of the scene. The Vagabond's memory of that face was too clear for growth in inches or the expression of womanhood to deceive him. It was *she!* He drank her in with the thirst of the many years weighted with his fancy. He was close enough to know the folly of his fears of a bearded mole. That little patch played into the dimple as of yore. She was the same girl, ruling those around her as she had him in their short acquaintance. As he surveyed her, with the blood drumming out a song in his temples, she never cast a glance in his direction.

He had no idea of the passing of the minutes, as heart and mind were lost in the intoxication of his sight. A hush as abrupt as an explosion in a cathedral recalled him. He looked in the direction in which she tossed her head contemptuously and saw, with the light from the roof streaming down upon his homely face and the dark passage of the corridor behind him, Abraham Lincoln, in seeming apology for his intrusion. His angularity was heightened by contrast with the man on whose arm he leaned. A nice, comfortable gentleman, this old President, long prostrate between two stools, with a welcome arm-chair by the fire and slippered obscurity at hand. To the galleries and the Senate he meant no more than the Vice-President's rostrum or the simple chairs for great figures placed in front of it or any piece of furniture necessary to the function. All parties knew him and had

THE VAGABOND

done with him, scarcely taking the time to give breath to the thought, as Mr. Lanley did, that at least he was a gentleman. Wearily they had counted the hours until he should go, meanwhile dissecting every word of his successor. A strange-looking knight this for a mighty work! It is difficult, if not impossible, now for the very leaders who saw him on that day to realize how he appeared to them then, when a shouting convention and geographical distribution of delegates had lifted him out of semi-obscurity to lead an impetuous, storm-riding new party that little foresaw the crisis its success would precipitate.

His height was great, and it was height without proportion. His pendulous arms hung pivotless by his side. But there was character and power in them; and character and power even in the black coat which hung on the stooping shoulders; and character and power even in the carelessly knotted black tie. The long, thin neck rose out of the ill-fitting collar as if it would lift the head higher than the height of the shoulders warranted. The ears were prodigious. His barber might have said that he shaved only for the purpose of keeping the hair away from his lips; so a fringe of beard encircled the chin, and the great mouth with its mobile lines was revealed. Not in the deep-set, soft eyes, seeming—as they were—so ready to forgive human weakness, but in that mouth lay the suggestion of the firmness that set the limit of his kindliness. The nose was as prodigious as the mouth and ears; as prodigious as the man, who was not cut out nicely but with grand strokes, worthy of the Almighty. The bushy eyebrows stood on two bony promontories, as if guarding the sweetness and

THE VAGABOND

tenderness of the lights through which his soul shone forth. A little space of sallow skin and then a thatch of straight black hair hid the brain that held the destiny of the nation. He was of the newest breed from the newest part of the New World, where the rivers carry their waters the length of a continent, and men are cast in that mould which can deal with great things in unaffected simplicity.

Well must he have known what the members of the august body were thinking, as well as he could keep his own counsel. The Southerners, with scores of cradle-trained statesmen in their well-formed battle-lines, smiled in elation over an opponent rough and unskilled. To the Westerners he was "Abe" Lincoln, good mixer and steady thinker, and their man. To the Eastern members he was the product of an environment at odds with his task. Had they foreseen the crisis, the Northerners, as a whole, would have sunk politics to choose some great man of the party of long-standing fame. We have to thank them for their kindness. We did not need the finished product of public service, confident that the wisdom for everyday affairs is sufficient for a crisis. We needed a mighty, patient soul! We needed the man!

Diffidently, in the tense silence, without even a fluttering whisper to interrupt it now, Abraham Lincoln, perhaps the first President to make no physical effort to rise to a theatrical occasion, walked down the aisle between the packed law-makers and the packed galleries, and awkwardly settled his lean person in the chair in front of the Vice-President's rostrum, where he awaited, in accord with the time-honored custom, the swearing-in of the Vice-President, Mr. Hamlin,

THE VAGABOND

of Maine, who had walked over to the Capitol as any other plain citizen would.

At that moment Southbridge was saying: "The Yankees needn't think anybody'll doubt his origin. You can see for yourself that he'd be much more at home if you put him in blue jeans and gave him an axe and a log."

Miss Lanley was sober.

"I—I wish, for the South's sake, he wasn't so—so strong," gasped her womanly intuition. "He's homely, he's uncouth, but oh, he *is* strong!"

Already the galleries were emptying, leaving the Vice-President to deliver his speech to vacant seats, while the spectators hastened to their places on the Capitol steps. When the Vagabond saw the Virginians rise, he led the way for the Captain and himself to go, as well, thinking not of addressing his Vision of the Pool but of getting a closer view. As he stepped from the bottom stair of one of the outlets of the gallery into the long corridor, looking among the throng and not at those immediately near for a sight of her, he had that chilling, ugly impression of treading on a lady's gown. He drew back, with some awkward, most sincere word of apology, and eyes met eyes, with a thrill to one pair only. After waiting for thirteen years, to introduce himself to her in that way! The mole dipped slightly into the chin, puckered with impatience on behalf of that poor back breadth, and she turned away, while in the gap that his sudden and forcible halt had formed, the youngest of her companions passed between them.

"The shouters for Abraham," said Southbridge, sounding the words in imitation of the Yankee nasal

THE VAGABOND

twang, "seem to have as big feet as Abraham. Probably Abraham will make this *gent* Minister to Austria. He would shine at court."

"He was sorry enough, poor bumpkin!" the Vagabond overheard her say. "Don't let him hear you."

"Yes, it might happen to anybody," the elder officer added, with the sharpness of long acquaintance with the other's foibles. "Everybody who comes to an inauguration can't be a Chesterfield or where would be the distinction for you?"

The party separated themselves from the crowd under the dome and passed out at the west wing, thus signifying that they had seen enough without witnessing the open-air ceremonies.

"When you are moving among ladies, sir," said the Captain, with a wink, "keep one eye on the tail of their gowns and the other eye on the look-out to divine their wishes. In that way, sir, you'll come to be appreciated by the whole woman."

Preoccupied by his embarrassment and exasperation, the Vagabond was oblivious of what passed around him. The Judges of the Supreme Court, the members of the Cabinet, the foreign Ministers filing down to their places on the platform, the favored constituents and their wives and daughters who packed the tiers of seats, were a confused mass of bustling, chattering people. With an effort he roused himself to a sense of appreciation when his companion, with affectionate pride, pointed out the still majestic figure of the veteran of two foreign wars twenty years apart, towering on his horse above the field of humanity that eddied under the varying impulses of its atoms, until, with a shock, it was

THE VAGABOND

still as the spare form of Abraham Lincoln stood before the people, who, by their free will, had delegated their power to him. In that silence of the great assembly, when all speech, all thought, all heart-beats seemed to have stopped with a click, they watched him kiss the Bible and take the oath to that Constitution whose interpretation was soon to be before the final tribunal of the sword.

When he began to speak, the silence of his adherents was broken by the shouted assertions and questions of his enemies, which would not have ceased had he been an orator. But the age of oratory, when swelling sentences rose from swelling chests; when the agitator stormed and the time-server compromised in rounded pauses; when sectional hatred was inspired by bigoted speech for local political ends, had passed. This leader, a citizen, talked to citizens. His gestures had not been studied beforehand in a Sumner's mirror; his thoughts were not sprung from a lawyer's bow. His garb, his gauntness, his awkwardness became the grace of personality, the emblems of power; and the crowd without exception listened not to an oration but to a talk from the heart of the new President to the heart of the people, who have always been wise when their servants have been truthful.

"He's like a great peak," said the Vagabond to the Captain. "Those that don't know it can't see for the fog that hangs over the plains. The peak will not dissolve in the mist. It still will be there, serene and unchanged, when the sun has driven the fog away; and then those who see it for the first time will call themselves discoverers."

XVII

MISS FELICIA AS AN AUNT

“Poor bumpkin!” The Vagabond kept repeating her exclamation to get the weight of it, the while he looked at his ready-made clothes. “He was sorry enough, poor bumpkin! Don’t let him hear you!” If her remark had the sting of condescension, it had also the evidence of a desire not to wound a stranger’s feelings any more than she would have kept the butterfly a prisoner in other days.

Instead of being angry, on consideration he found here a note in keeping with his conception of her character. As far as man could well be from having his dream fulfilled, he was nearer than he had been, in that the essentials to make it true existed. For his ideal was a reality that definitely lived and moved. It was creditable, when desire to know her better and desire to overcome the ill impression he had made called him to her—above all, creditable in one who always expressed himself in action—not to seek precipitately another meeting. Washington was no place for telling his story, he knew; the company she had with her was in nowise fit to be listeners. She must be alone the next time he saw her and—again he looked at his ready-made clothes, bought in a hurry. What man could feel like a knight in them! If he had been in a miner’s shirt he was sure that he

THE VAGABOND

would not have stepped on her gown, which, the more he thought of it, deserved her censure. It is proper enough to talk of the coat not making the man; but the man, being made, is neglectful if his coat does not fit. Father Bob showed a nice appreciation of this in that he would not pay his call on General Scott until he had a new uniform, and from him the Vagabond had imbibed habits of neatness and a care as to his personal appearance.

Anon, he told himself that clothes did not make one awkward; a man could avoid that though he was clad in a night-cap, linen duster, and miner's boots, if—and the ifs were rather against him. His garb set on his limbs in the same awkward repression that the crowds and the talk of place and preference at Willard's between shots at the cuspidors set on his spirit. It occurred to him that there was one thing which, however unimportant it was in mine-finding and mine-managing, might play a great part in winning a girl. He looked into the mirror in his room, fearfully, questioningly.

"Those freckles are pretty nearly washed out," he said; "but the eyes, damnation! They're fast dye, like a china doll's. The hair—it isn't exactly red now, or brown, either! However, I'm a pretty good mountain-climber, anyway, and one day I'll appear on the Lanley plantation with the manner of a man who is used to walking on carpets in a maze of trains." With that, he laughed lightly; for he could not long be solemn or introspective.

His readiness to leave Washington, his silence as to the girl, led the Captain into the great error of supposing that his ward—who at that moment saw in

THE VAGABOND

fancy a face framed in a bonnet—had realized the breadth of the Potomac River in 1861 and was already quit of his folly. Therefore, he broke out mischievously in his joy with a nudge in the ribs and “Girl!” which the Vagabond received with an “Oh, yes!” of some satisfaction over the fact that evidently the Captain had not recognized among the people in the gallery the little Miss General of the Post.

Before the train which took them to Belmore came to a stop, the Vagabond had a good view of the Judge, standing on the platform, only a little more changed than the old town itself. He had actually given up the stock, supplanting it by a style of collar five years out of date, and his girth was reaching proportions that were more indicative of judicial solidity than of systematic exercise. His face, once older than his age—an illusion that had made him the youngest judge the county had ever had—was now younger, being of the kind that sets its expression early and is preserved by an even temper. The Vagabond leapt from the car-step with a boyish shout, and before his uncle could resist he had his arms around him in a press of affection that left the Bench with little breath. They made a striking contrast, the soft-tissued, book-loving office hermit and the lithe, muscular, quick-moving youth.

“Now, sir,” the Vagabond said, “I’ll sit in the court all day and I’ll let you read law to me all night to pay you for being the mean, ungrateful little beggar that I was. And here’s Father Bob, only five or six years younger than when you saw him last.”

“Ten,” prompted the Captain. “Well, sir, I brought him back, didn’t I? You were well rid of

THE VAGABOND

him, Judge. He's a devil, sir, a devil. You'd never kept him in that law-office. Why, California isn't big enough for him!"

The Judge, meanwhile surveying his nephew, was a picture of serene family pride. He had treasured this home-coming.

"And Miss Felicia? I thought she'd be here, too—she'd be with you! I didn't think it necessary to telegraph to both."

"She's up at the house," said the Judge, "and so far as I can comprehend a woman's motives, she will probably not set the dog on us if we pay our respects."

"Miss Felicia!" said the Vagabond, wagging his head. "Is it still Miss?"

"It is," was the stern response.

"Oh, uncle, uncle, uncle!" repeated the Vagabond; while the Captain, determined that the teasing should not be on one side, nudged him and said, "Girl!" which the Judge misunderstood to the point of anger.

"Shall we go to Miss Hope's?" said he, in the manner of charging a jury.

They found the lady crocheting in the sitting-room. Upon their entry she rose with a formal bow as if she were receiving a bishop.

"Oh, you can't put me off with any prim good-mornings!" the Vagabond cried, in ecstasy. "I'm not so modest as the Judge, dear aunt."

"Aunt?" exclaimed Miss Felicia.

Before she could protest farther, he had his arms around her and had planted half a dozen kisses on her cheeks, and finally her lips met his in a kind of consenting pucker. The Captain was put out by this

THE VAGABOND

impetuosity. He had been rehearsing for months what he should say by way of introduction of his protégé to that lady who had questioned the ability of an army officer to care for a boy's morals. He spoke it now mechanically and not with that mock humility he had promised himself.

"Yes, ma'am, so please you, this is the barbarous, uneducated savage I've brought up."

"He quite justifies the compliment," Miss Felicia confessed, while her eyes were bright with admiration for his positive manner, and two spots glowing on her cheeks made her the despair of the cautious Bench.

"Aunt, aunt—*aunt* I shall always call you," the Vagabond went on, holding her off at arms' length, "no matter how faint the judicial heart. You don't know how fond I am of you since I've thought you over. Oh, but you haven't grown a day older! I'm proud of being associated with such a good-looking relative." With that, he kissed her again, while the spots on her cheeks spread and the Judge changed color and sighed. "I hope you forgive me for being such an intractable boy. Just think how much I wanted to climb that mountain! Do you forgive me?"

His grammar was good; his manner was not without distinction, she had to admit.

"I forgive myself," said Miss Felicia, "for insisting on John's keeping you. It is very sweet of you to think so much of an old maid." Tears sparkled in her eyes. She wiped them away as if they were wicked intruders. "Now, sir, let me look at you!" She drew back a few feet and surveyed him critically. "You're a pretty fair specimen of a young man and

THE VAGABOND

you've still enough freckles left for mischief," she added, with a courtesy that made her seem more youthful; a fact that did not escape the Bench, which wiped its brow, helplessly.

She unbent more and more, until, besides being mirthful, she developed underneath her prim exterior a dry wit that illumined her shrewdness as she questioned him about his work. So encouraged was the Judge by her good-humor that for the first time in two years he formally came to the attack that night in a most florid speech introduced by the happy home-coming, which was refused in as few words as usual. The next day he responded to his nephew's badinage thus:

"There are conditions under which I should accept it amiably; but under the present circumstances it is a painful reminder of what might have been."

The Vagabond asked pardon and was the more regretful that so fine a pair should be separated. Indeed, he turned match-maker.

"You must know some fine woman of thirty or so, a widow, say," he went on. "Suppose you take her out driving and to church and show her attentions generally."

"Why?" asked the man of law, blandly.

"To win Aunt—Aunt Felicia. She would resent it, pretend not to care, and discover her own feelings. Result, she would melt."

"I—I couldn't do that," responded the man of law. "Felicia is the only woman in Belmore—in the world, I may as well say—that I know at all well. She's the only one I can talk to. Why, on my word, I wouldn't know what to say to any other. I can't

THE VAGABOND

talk about crinoline.” Then he turned on the Vagabond with an indignation which is possible even in an equable temperament: “I am a patient man, but, by God Almighty, I resent this interference in my private affairs!”

“Not interference—interest, please. However, I wash my hands of you both, and I would no more do anything to hurt you, uncle, than I would give my mine to the first beggar I met on the street-corner. I’m fond of you and of my aunt, and if you were united, why, I could unite my affections.”

Nevertheless, the first time he was alone with Miss Felicia he led up to the wisdom, the natural logic of a happy consummation in which he would be willing to be the best man.

“Where is your halter?” Felicia asked, after listening demurely, her lips twitching with amusement or hauteur—it was hard to tell which.

“My halter!”

“Yes. Did John pull it out of your hand when you were leading him down the road?”

“No. I met him heart-broken by the wayside and came to plead his cause.” He drew a long face. “Mine is not a grateful task. I undertake it only because I am certain of my premises. I am certain that at heart you love him!”

“Villain!” shrieked Felicia, because it was the first word that came to her mind. “I don’t! I don’t!” came over her shoulder, as she rushed out of the room, closing the door.

When he opened it cautiously after a judicious interval he found her wildly dusting the piano for the sixth time.

THE VAGABOND

"You don't withdraw your invitation to supper, do you, aunt?" he asked, humbly.

"It depends. I don't if you will never mention that subject again, never, never!"

"Never, then; absolutely never, till I throw rice at you!" he replied.

"Pooh!" responded Felicia. "I'll at least marry a man that has a mind of his own. John! He's for compromise. He says Greeley is carried away by the power of his language to express radical views. He's for something—he doesn't know what he's for—something to please the slave-owners and save the Union and make everybody as small as his conscience."

"Why, do you want him to agree with you on everything and show he has a mind of his own in that way?"

"No! No! I—I want him to be reasonable!" she fairly sputtered.

XVIII

HIS HORSE CASTS A SHOE

It befell that Miss Felicia and the Captain, formerly of two opposite poles of thought—the severely civil, as a New England Indian sympathizer understood it, and the severely military, as an Indian fighter understood it—were in hearty accord. Together they read the *Tribune*, applauding its editorial passion, while the Judge gravely shook his head over the news columns of the *Times*. If the Southerners wanted to rebel, let them rebel, said the Captain; and then, ma'am, let the United States put rebellion down in the only way to put a rebellion down—shoot it down, ma'am, shoot it down! In different words, Miss Felicia expressed the same opinion. Better, a thousand times, that blood should flow, said she, than that a people should stultify their consciences.

“The North and the South, entranced by their invective, are engaged in a mad contest of misrepresentation of each other,” said the Judge. “I still hope that reason will prevail.” And he went back to his library and looked at the portraits of Marshall (Virginian) and Jefferson (Virginian), and shook his head sadly and burrowed in his leather-bound books for consolation.

THE VAGABOND

To the Vagabond, the continual discussion stood for that strange thing called politics, which had little interest for him. When a Californian would take to the trail, he thought, an Easterner takes to talking. Soon his views were too well known to be further sought.

"I am willing to leave it to Abraham Lincoln," he always said.

It was incomprehensible to his simple nature, entirely constructive, that either side should believe in its verbiage so far as to try to destroy the other.

Meanwhile, he was preoccupied with something of far more interest to him than politics of any order. The girl's face flitted before his eyes before he slept and upon waking. He found a new pleasure in being alone, for then he was in her company. The secession of States was to him, most of all and worst of all, the heightening of the barrier between them. Nothing about the crisis was so vexatious to him as the tendency of everyone to make it a personal matter. When the rest of the world was asking, "Will Lincoln call for troops?" he was asking, "Why shouldn't a girl love a man though he come to her out of the enemy's land?" When the rest of the world was asking, "Will Virginia secede?" he was asking, "Do Virginia women have as strong political prejudices as Aunt Felicia?"

His objects in postponing his visit to the Lanley homestead were twofold. He waited upon the subsidence of the war excitement, when the curtain should go down on the "riot of words" in a compromise; and he wanted to be more sure of himself as a dweller in the centres of civilization. The latter hur-

THE VAGABOND

ried him to New York while the Captain was on a visit to an old major at the Post and Tim Booker was still using the paint-brush dipped in red. A Broadway tailor made him feel more at ease; he attended to the manufacture of his machinery; and he had the entrée to certain houses whose formalities were supposed to take off rough edges.

When the Captain rejoined him early in April, Sumter lay under the Confederate guns, whose blast might at any moment come as the foreword of war. Even this news New York received with the blandness of a reading public over-used to sensation. It was the old cry of "Wolf! wolf!" said mankind over its morning papers in the horse-cars. The days wore on, until the inevitable was as clear to the thoughtful as the outline of Trinity's steeple against the sky. To one whose country had been his employer and his passion, the attitude of the great city immured in its own concerns seemed callous and heartless.

"The time has come for me to go to Washington and tell General Scott that I am at his service," the Captain declared.

It was not until they were on the train that the Vagabond revealed that his own object in coming was more than comradeship.

"I think I had better hurry up and call on the girl," he said.

"What in the devil! What! What! I thought you had got over that foolishness. Hm-m! Still waters run deep. I might have known you wouldn't, you've been so quiet about it."

"Well, what did you think of her? Or didn't you recognize her? No, you didn't. You didn't know

THE VAGABOND

that the girl whose gown I stepped on was one and the same with little Miss General!"

Recollection was quick enough with the Captain now. He laughed at himself as a stupid old bachelor, who ought to have known her by the mole on her chin, if in no other way. Then he realized that her beauty only added to the difficulties.

"You are actually going down to her place to call on her?" he asked.

"Why, of course, Father Bob."

"Expect me to go along to introduce you, eh?"

"No. I wouldn't have you for worlds. Two is company."

"Do you expect she will recognize you?"

"No. If she should, it might spoil the point of my story."

The Captain's vexation was growing under the spur of the Vagabond's airy responses.

"I thought you'd be like this if you ever got in love," he said. "Are you telling her—yes, sir, are you going to tell her you are in love?"

"If I have the great privilege of being alone with her, I think I'd better; for it will be my only chance for some time if there's a war."

"How in the devil!" whispered the Captain, hoarsely. "Don't you know she hates a Yankee like poison? Where's your self-respect? Don't you know she'll make all kinds of fun of you? Her grandfather'll take his cane to you. Yes, sir, more likely he'll take his pistol. Where's your self-respect? Do you want to turn yourself into a circus—into a booby—you, a man of means and position, sir—and position, sir—going hat in hand where you're not wanted?"

THE VAGABOND

"You make it more interesting than I supposed. If it weren't for surprises the world would be exceedingly dull, Father Bob."

"Confound you, sir! Did I bring you up to act like this?" the Captain sputtered. "What excuse have you got to offer? Going to say, 'I dreamed I loved you, Miss; will you name the day?' Going to pass yourself off as a pedler?"

"I hadn't thought of that. It's not so bad. Still, I think I have a better way."

"Well, all I've got to say is that when a man's bound to make a fool of himself, why, push him along and have the agony over. Go ahead! go ahead!"

The Captain turned and looked out of the window in his huff, and the Vagabond, leaning toward him, put his hand ever so gently on his shoulder and said, softly and consolingly:

"I'm sorry not to take you. Maybe I can next time."

"Now you're poking fun at me—trying to make out I'm jealous, by the Eternal! Well, there's no use of wasting words. I'll have my joke on you when you come back." He slapped his protégé's knee and called him a villain—that kind of a villain which indicates fondness.

The national peril was on every tongue as the Captain and the Vagabond passed through the streets of Washington, where the different provincial streams from States and districts make a political city in the dullest of times. At Willard's, where they dined, waiters worked their way through the gestures of disputants and prophets. The Captain met an-

THE VAGABOND

other veteran, who shared his table. They got on swimmingly as long as they were inquiring after the health of various comrades; but when it came to secession, the other veteran was for compromise, while the Captain, with a thunderous "By G—, sir!" declared that the only way to put a rebellion down was to shoot it down, sir.

While they argued, the Vagabond was despatching his meal and counting the minutes to a purpose. When he rose and said that he was going to catch the train to Alexandria, which was a little nearer than Washington to a certain plantation, the Captain went with him to the door of the dining-room (where the least concerned of all present about the fate of his race, the black head-waiter, raised a walking-beam arm to usher in the guests) and seized the Vagabond by the lapel of his coat. The discussion and the excitement had warmed his blood and his partisanship and given birth to an apprehension.

"Look here, sir," he said, "suppose there is war, what are you going to do?"

"Seems to me that's before we come to the bridge. Honestly, I haven't thought of it. I'm leaving my part of it to Lincoln, I repeat. Of one thing I'm sure: I'd rather climb a mountain than go to war, and just now I'd rather go to see the girl than either."

This seemed to the old man very much like evasion. He had a vision of this care-free youth, with his ideas of chivalry, carried away by the cause of the South and the guile of a woman's beauty.

"I said suppose, sir, *suppose!*"

"Why, what should I be doing except keeping step with you, Father Bob? I must hurry. I'll be with

THE VAGABOND

you to-morrow or the day after, at the latest. It's not a *long* story!" he called back, as he hastened out.

In his imagination, the Captain put terrible responsibilities on the head of Miss Lanley. He began to regard his ward as an enigma, and he blamed himself for running the risk of bringing him East and possibly changing his nature from simplicity to complexity; for the fact that a man who had fought at Lundy's Lane counselled compromise had made the world awry. On his approach to his table he saw the veteran stiffening to renew the conflict, and he himself stiffened and thought that if the boy came to believe in the other side, then, in all justice to his own conscience, he must fight as he believed and his adopted father would do the same.

As for the Vagabond, before he retired for the night he had visited a livery-stable, where he had not chosen a horse for a few hours' journey until he had examined the hoofs of several.

So it came to pass that at dawn the next day he was riding along a Virginia highway upon the errand which has taken more than one knight, with a bold heart beneath his breast-plate and a restless brain under his helmet, into the enemy's country. He entertained no conception of his journey as Quixotic. Did the good Don of blessed memory ever think of himself as being so? If folly did not seem the reasonable thing to its perpetrators, there would be little romance in the world.

No miser could have counted his day's gains with more pleasure than our hero found in the sheer delight of living. From his saddle he looked out upon the oldest of the colonies in the spring-time. A week's

THE VAGABOND

sunshine had dried the mud. The foliage was freshly unfolded and the dry air seemed to sing in his nostrils, the while anticipation sang in his heart. He was going to see a girl—just a girl!—whose face he knew but who did not know him; a girl who would naturally regard him as a hated outlander. He was not framing the words he would use, but was content, in his appreciation of the diversion of any surprise, to leave the details to the event's making—a square-shouldered, clear-eyed traveller with a boy's heart, an honest man's candor, and a vagabond's humor that makes courage seem a part of the play. His was more than the glorious illusion of youth; he had a way of making his dreams come true.

The directions how to reach his destination met all the demands of poetic justice for such an enterprise. He was told that he need only keep on until he came to the great house, for there was none other on the road. When it seemed to him, as he reckoned distance, that he must be near his goal, the low tumult of horses' hoofs broke the silence. He looked across the fields to see a man and a woman mounted approaching a fence at the gallop. The woman led, and she took it first, clearing it by a wider space than the man. This was a spectacle quite new to the Vagabond.

"That's something like! That's my kind of a girl!" he thought; and he had the impulse to try a fence himself, then and there.

Keeping up their furious pace, the man becoming a worse and worse second, the riders soon disappeared from view. When he reached the rising ground that had hidden them, they were just passing

THE VAGABOND

under the trees which held the Lanley house in seclusion. Then he berated his dull perception and congratulated himself at the same time.

"Of course it's shel!" he informed himself, gleefully. "If I had a good horse she wouldn't have to wait so long."

It was well that he did not have a good horse, else he would have been face to face with an amazed young woman without any excuse for his presence; and he had nursed that excuse carefully. As it was, he kept his pace until he was opposite the drive and completely hidden from the house. Having dismounted for a moment and secured himself as the most reasonable of callers, he proceeded up the driveway, bearing his sesame in his whip-hand.

When the foliage no longer screened it, he saw that a group on the porch was composed solely of Mr. Lanley, Mrs. Bulwer and her son, who had been Volilla's companion on the ride. This did not dismay him so far as she of his heart's desire was concerned, for he took it for granted that she had gone to change her gown. The others, however, were in the way; indeed, the story might not be told at all in their presence.

At sight of a stranger, the old man rose, bowed, and bade him a most hospitable good-morning.

"I find myself in something of a predicament," the Vagabond said. "My horse has cast a shoe; and rather than lame him, I am going to ask your smith to set it."

XIX

THE SHADOW OF WAR

"Certainly, sir," said Mr. Lanley. "Under the circumstances I should feel that you had done very ill indeed if you had not stopped. You will rest, and we shall have your company, sir, in the meanwhile."

"I seem to have a wise horse, in that he chose so hospitable a neighborhood for the accident," the guest remarked, as he dismounted.

It did not occur to Mr. Lanley to give his own name, for he could not conceive of anybody getting so far into Virginia without knowing it.

"I take it that you are a stranger, sir," he suggested, as he led the way up the steps.

"I beg your pardon, yes. My name is Williams, and I am from California."

Affably and simply, yet without any suggestion in manner that their association would be more than temporary, Mr. Lanley introduced the new-comer to Mrs. Bulwer and her son. We have already seen the portraits of these two as they appeared in the Senate gallery on the day of the inauguration. It is high time that we should know more of them. Mrs. Bulwer, strictly Virginian, was an aunt who had taken the place of a mother to Volilla. When the new mistress of Lanleyton had arrived, Richard was away at West Point. His letters were the stars of his moth-

THE VAGABOND

er's night; his home-comings her only season of daylight. Her increasing age at length had led him to resign from his beloved artillery to take charge of the plantation, which sadly needed a master. Thus the family group was complete—an elderly brother and sister and two young cousins—separated only by the two miles that lay between their houses. Richard came to Lanleyton every day when Volilla was not with her aunt, and every day witnessed such a dashing return from a ride as had whipped the blood in the Vagabond's veins on his approach. Her horse was one piece of extravagance, one proof of his adoration, for which the grandfather was forgiven, with soft arms encircling his neck. In the spring of '59 he returned from a visit to Richmond with a thorough-bred that he had bought after spirited bidding over the head of a wealthy tobacco merchant.

"Not a word as to the price, my dear," he begged. "It's fit that the finest girl in Virginia—a girl who knows how to ride—should have the finest horse in Virginia. Would to God that my bones were twenty years younger and I had one like him to keep you company! Pooh! I'd show Richard how to take a six-barred gate!"

She made the hunter the more cherished by christening him "Folly." The comment ran that if Folly were ill, his mistress was; if lame, she did not sleep for worrying. He took the place of winters in Richmond and Washington and of a tour abroad, which had once been an indispensable part of a Lanley's education.

Of the lady who rode Folly, Richard had once given, in a bantering rally, this judicial opinion:

"You have a skittish humor that does not balk at

THE VAGABOND

the unusual," he told her. "You have all the loyalty of a Scotsman to his clan. Your love of out-door sports is a masculine delight. You are deeper than you think, as a crisis might show, and you are always charming—always, even when you are prejudiced."

"So *you* say! And your pulse never varies, dear Richard," she replied. "If a mine should explode in the yard this minute, you would calmly brush the dust from your clothes and estimate the amount of powder in the charge. You are so eminently just that you would sentence yourself to jail, mention all mitigating circumstances, and bail yourself out, in the full consciousness of having done a friend a favor. There's nothing you need so much as a little prejudice to give you seasoning. Besides, if you had as fast a horse as I have, you'd have a different set of opinions."

.Whatever miserable half-hours Bulwer may have had in his own room when he looked in the depths of his heart and realized what was fastened there, in her presence he never allowed his feelings to exceed mere cousinly camaraderie. He was her big chum, a privilege not to be risked lightly; her big chum he proposed to remain.

Not so Lieutenant Jefferson Southbridge, another frequent visitor to Lanleyton, who was stationed in Washington. Southbridge was born for a sensational existence. The regularity of army life in time of peace only conserved an energy which would break forth the more violently when opportunity came. You must turn to his ancestors for a shadowy explanation of this Puritan and cavalier in one; this gay and prodigiously solemn, this reckless and dramatically ear-

THE VAGABOND

nest, this austere and vain, over-dressed young man, who read his Bible diligently and thrummed Spanish tunes on a guitar. His mother had been the daughter of a rigidly orthodox, sourly priggish pastor; his father, the over-wild son of a wild, hard-drinking, gracefully swearing planter, the pair making a sensational runaway match. In after years the father had turned to religion, and the mother had become a famous gossip and married flirt in Richmond, whose weakness was over-dress, and who died from exposing herself in a ball-gown.

Southbridge's heart was no sooner affected than he laid it all palpitating on his sleeve for my lady to look at. Rebuffs were no more to his impetuous soul than the mile-stones on a journey. He had proposed to Volilla half a dozen times and he was bound to keep on proposing. On the morning that the Vagabond rode up the drive at Lanleyton, the dislike of a third person in the party was not the sole cause that restrained him from joining Richard and Volilla in their dash across the fields. For weeks past he had been going at once gayly and devoutly to war for a principle, and this morning he had ridden to the railroad station for the latest news from Charleston.

The Vagabond, from the moment that he noted the absence of the one person whom he had come to see, was in the sway of a great fear. Suppose that she did not appear at all? Could he ask for her? Only on the ground that he had known her when he was a boy, and that was more than making confession. It was taking the key-stone and the base-stones out of his plan, which was, first, to know if she would recognize him, and, second, once old acquaintance was remem-

THE VAGABOND

bered, to tell his story with only one pair of ears in hearing.

"From California? Really!" said Mrs. Bulwer. "Did you look for gold?"

"Yes, and found a little," he replied, smiling.

Mrs. Bulwer was gently sceptical as well as curious. Her idea of miners had been of "pardners" in sombreros and open-throated shirts and high boots, as pictured in the few wood-cuts of contemporary life which then carried information and misinformation to the four corners of the earth.

"How does California stand on the question of secession?" Mr. Lanley asked.

"As a rule, the Californians I know are for the Union," was the reply.

Mr. Lanley lowered his iron-gray brows angrily; his black eyes snapped. He started as if to make a vehement denial. But he was a host, a Virginia host.

"Oh, indeed, sir!" he said, politely if pointedly.

"I knew several army officers who were in California," Bulwer interjected, diplomatically. "One was Captain 'Bob' Herrick, an old fellow whom I saw a lot of in Mexico. I heard that he adopted a runaway boy. I could quite imagine him doing such a thing. He was splendid, splendid!"

"Oh, yes. I've seen him—a—number of times."

This was what the Vagabond said, resisting temptation. He appreciated how easy it would be by defining his relations to the Captain exactly and mentioning a certain army post to make himself a guest long enough to assure a meeting with the one whom he had come to see. But he refused to play his fancy false. He did not want to be introduced or explained to her.

THE VAGABOND

He must come to her on this first occasion literally out of the blue.

"And did he do well, he and the boy? Tell me more about him—splendid old 'Bob' Herrick!"

Even Mrs. Bulwer elevated her brows to find her placid son so adjectively enthusiastic about anything.

"Very—both he and the boy," was the response. "He is in Washington now, waiting on the orders of General Scott in case the country needs his services."

While he spoke the Vagabond was looking toward the stable, fearing the approach of his horse and praying that the smith would be dilatory.

"Oh, he is!" Bulwer answered, thoughtfully.

"It is scarcely comprehensible, yet it is true," Mr. Lanley put in, savagely, "that General Scott, now arming an invading force against us, is a Virginian; yes, a Virginian, sir!"

"That is true," said the Vagabond, realizing how differently a piece of information sounded on the southern side of the Potomac. "Judging by the vigorous manner in which two riders disappeared under your trees there as I came in sight of the house, it is a proud thing to have been born in Virginia."

"Volilla! Ah, you saw Volilla on Folly!" exclaimed Mr. Lanley, politics all forgotten, the gouty twinge passing, the very mention of his idol being like the bouquet of a vintage to an epicurean nostril.

There was a rustle of skirts in the hall, which bore sweeter message than the courier from a victorious field to an emperor's ears. The Vagabond's journey was not in vain; he was not to be cheated of his object. She stood before him. His faculties were superbly acute, yet benumbed as by the pricking of thousands

THE VAGABOND

of joyful needles. Men falling great distances are said to have supernatural facility of sight and thought; why should not those rising to heaven in the moment long dreamed of and conjured with? For the first time since he had crossed his heart and hoped to die that he would not rob birds' nests, he was face to face and speaking with the realized image of his fancy. Every detail of the glowing picture in the frame of the doorway charmed his senses as he rose from his seat. She had changed her gown for one that showed the house, the soft, the feminine side of her nature, even as the riding-habit showed the healthy, the daring, the romping, the free, the buoyant side. At home she had dared to disregard the outlandish coiffure of the time. A big braid doubled in at the back took its place. Abundantly, with the sheen and color of the chestnut fresh from the burr, her hair rose from the temples in a crest that played with the soft sunlight as a royal mate. In the Senate gallery her beauty had been stricken as a painting may be with an unsuitable frame. Here it was free and natural, from brow to open-throated gown.

He heard Mr. Lanley saying, "My granddaughter" and "Mr. Williams, of California," etc. He had no illusions that he was anything more. His face, he realized in swift definiteness, had called to her memory no incident of a meeting with an odd little boy on the bank of a New England creek.

As the touch of her fingers to his in their stereotyped greeting went thrilling to his head, he wished for nothing so much as that three or four superfluous persons might be transported out of sight and hearing. He was in the flood of a mood to make eloquent

THE VAGABOND

that story which he had to tell her. But the company was to be increased rather than diminished. All had turned to look in the direction of the road whence came the sound of a horseman approaching at the gallop.

"Southbridge, of course," said Bulwer. "I fancy he has big news."

The garb of no Californian could be more ridiculous to a Virginian than that of the man who burst from under the trees was to the Vagabond. He wore a large blue sash, falling from his waist in tasselled ends, high cavalry-man's boots, a gray uniform glittering with brass buttons, while he swung over his head a soft hat surmounted by a long ostrich plume.

"It's begun! It's begun! We're bombarding Sumter!" he shouted.

"Glorious! glorious!" Volilla cried, gliding past the others to the steps.

"High time!" growled Mr. Lanley, who had long ago worn out his enthusiasm in disgust over the dilatoriness of his State.

Bulwer said nothing.

Southbridge threw himself from the saddle with a cavalry-man's abandon. He raised his hat again.

"I told you I'd bring the news first," he said. "What do you think of my new uniform? I've had it ready for a month, and I stopped only long enough at Leggat's to put it on. These spurs"—he turned a heel to show them—"are old Spanish and solid silver. I'm going to organize five companies of cavalry, so I'm a colonel now—Colonel of the Virginia Firsts, if you please, ladies and gentlemen." He bowed again.

"Bravo!" cried Volilla, not with respect to his garb,

THE VAGABOND

but for his enthusiasm for the cause. "I have something for you—a reward." With that she hastened back into the house.

At first glance it was difficult to know whether Southbridge took himself seriously or not. The flash of his eye when he saw the stranger's lips twitching with amusement was proof that he did. Quick in his likes and dislikes, from that moment he counted the Vagabond an enemy.

No one could deny that the man's musketeer garb became him. He was uncommonly tall, with a straight nose, black, curling hair, and a full, wavy beard which did not belie his youth but rather impressed it upon the beholder. His face had the contrast to Bulwer's of sensation to moderation. Bulwer had the Lanley nose, with the thin, high cartilage bending with a thorough-bred curve to the finely chiselled nostrils. His full forehead, his square yet well-rounded chin, his reposeful mouth—every feature was lacking in the extravagance which accentuated the features of the younger officer.

"Are you going to carry that guitar of yours slung over your back when you make a charge, Jefferson?" asked Bulwer, pleasantly.

"If you join my command I shall need a little music to offset that solemn face of yours."

Volilla now reappeared in the door-way in smiling triumph as she shook out the folds of a silk State flag, whose floating end fell about Southbridge's feet.

"I made it with my own hands, and I'll embroider it with the name of the Virginia Firsts—the first Virginians to draw the sword for our rights," she said.

Southbridge swept the floor of the porch with his

THE VAGABOND

plume, his other hand on his heart, and bowed as low as his waist.

"God is with us," he said. "With His blessing, with right on our side, the sons of Virginia will send the whining Yankees back to their shops. Aye, with my own hand I will raise this flag on the Capitol at Washington, where, in a month's time, we shall dictate our terms of peace."

The Vagabond was not looking at the man but at the girl, whose face, lighted with purpose and enthusiasm, fascinated him. For the first but by no means the last time, he found himself wishing that he might meet Southbridge on the edge of a precipice; for already he had begun to realize that back of this strange man's vainglory and boasting there was the genuine ability which makes enmity worth while.

Having laid the flag over a chair caressingly, with words of admiration for the needle-work, the plumed messenger turned toward his rival in sarcasm as pointed as the ends of his mustache.

"Well, Bulwer, are you for Virginia or against her? You can't be a peace-at-any-price man much longer."

"I don't see anything to shout over in the prospect of shooting at the officers I have fought with and at the flag I have fought under," Bulwer replied, good-humoredly. "Still, when it comes to war, I may lay on as heavy blows as you. And we shall need heavy blows. We shall not be in Washington in a month; oh, not in a month, Jefferson."

"Cousin, did our forefathers wait?" Volilla had stepped nearer to Bulwer and she spoke passionately. "Did sentiment forever attach them to the British

THE VAGABOND

flag when they were wronged under it? Didn't they go to their work with a cheer and a whole heart? Come, you are a Virginian!"

"Yes, so you *should* go once you start. Perhaps if you had been a foreign attaché as I have and knew as I do that Europe would like nothing better than to see us split up into tribes like the Indians, you might regard it as a necessity but not as a source of joy that the United States should be cut in two. My State has paid its share toward my education at West Point and toward maintaining me in the army. It played the greatest part of all the colonies in winning for each one its freedom. Now it must fight again, not against a king but against a Northern majority who would make us a minority without representation. The Southern clime wants only to keep its sunlight, as it ever has. The North will be the invader. When the first Union soldier sets foot on the soil of Virginia, then every Virginian with a drop of red blood in his veins must resist or hold out his hand to the burglar that is climbing in at his window."

"Good, good! I knew you would!" She sat down on the arm of his chair in a most cousinly fashion. "I'll make a flag for you and bind it with gold cord and embroider something on it about the rejoicing over the one sinner who repenteth."

Only such news as Southbridge had brought, only such a crisis, could have made the actors in this scene so oblivious to the presence of a stranger. The Vagabond realized into what a different world a few hours' ride might take a traveller in his own country. To them the North was a monster, stealing the fire from their hearth-stones, the meat from their larders. Mr.

THE VAGABOND

Lanley, the more so in that he had tried spasmodically to mend his extravagant ways, blamed his bankruptcy on the Government rather than on economic change. Volilla, now aware of their straits, had come into womanhood with an intensity of affection for all the acres and buildings that were the Lanleys' own, not exceeded by the founder of the house. It was she who turned to the Vagabond, aflame with patriotism, and bending toward him in a transport of interest and anxiety as to his answer to the question, asked:

"How is California going, sir? With us?"

"No, I think it is for the Union."

She stiffened in amazement. There was scepticism of the truth of his reply in the changed expression of her eyes, though she did not give it word.

"Indeed! And how do you stand?"

In his disgust, Southbridge was guilty of pressing a stranger with this direct question.

For the first time, the Vagabond had a partisan view of the impending conflict. He had only to look at Volilla to know that a word could make her a friend or an enemy. As an ally, he had a footing; as an adversary, the Potomac was as broad as the Milky Way. He felt that he would be grime under her feet if he dodged the issue; he felt, too, a pleasure in giving Southbridge a clear answer; a pleasure, also, in raising another obstacle which it would be his delight to overcome.

"I only wish," he said, "that there was a mountain so high that from it you could see from the Atlantic to the Pacific, and that every man and woman in the United States, both North and South, could get out of the dust of township roads and the mists of low-

THE VAGABOND

lands and climb to the summit and see how nature has bounded our country by seas and rivers and lakes and meant it to be one and undivided."

"Aye, aye!" said Bulwer.

"I only wish that, condoning each other's faults, the South could know the North and the North could know the South as brothers and partners should know each other."

"So do I wish it!" Bulwer had lifted himself in his chair. His fine, calm face was alight with the abstraction of the Vagabond's idea, and the glances of the two men met in the steady gaze of mutual understanding and admiration.

"Bah!" Southbridge tossed the word out contemptuously. "Weep awhile, Dicky."

"Yes, I have only to look at you, Jefferson," Bulwer continued, "to know how impossible is our dream."

Southbridge made a movement toward Bulwer; but Bulwer, falling back into his easy attitude, only smiled masterfully.

"I had not finished," the Vagabond ventured. "I wish to say that if war is to come, I am for the Union with all my heart."

His little speech was followed by a moment's bursting silence; and if Bulwer had not supplied the word to prick it, the coming of a horse from the stable would. With a flattering glance he regarded the firm chin of the Vagabond and the erect torso poised on the edge of the chair, and said lightly to Southbridge:

"You see, Jefferson, as I have always maintained, we shall find enemies worthy of our steel."

THE VAGABOND

"To spit on it!" rejoined Southbridge, hotly.

"Gentlemen! gentlemen!" Mr. Lanley could never allow his prejudices to usurp his hospitality. "Each for his side, and settle your arguments in the field and not on the porch. Mr. Williams, you are to be praised for your candor."

"Yes, and whatever else this war between fellow-countrymen is to be, it ought to be impersonal," Bulwer added.

Meanwhile the Vagabond had not ceased to watch the play of emotion on Volilla's face. Her expression was one of incomprehension of how anyone who seemed fair-minded and fair-spoken should take the side of the North. When he heard hoofs crunching on the gravel it was a signal which, in the strained situation, he could not well disregard. He had it in mind to ask her to recall the small boy who once caught a butterfly for her, but his old aversion to any except a fair opportunity, when he should tell his whole story, prevailed. While two emblems of restrained indignation flamed on her cheek, she took his hand, smiling dutifully as a hostess.

"A pleasant journey!" she said.

"You say that to an enemy!" he exclaimed, lightly.

"When he is going *out* of Virginia; a short and an unpleasant one to the invader."

Her reply gave him pleasure. It was still another proof that the girl of his fancy grown woman was worthy of his conception. He knew nothing in the world so well at that moment as that he loved her.

Finally, when he had paid his respects to Mrs. Bulwer and expressed his thanks to all for their tolerance for an adversary as well as their direct kindness to him,

THE VAGABOND

he offered his hand to Southbridge, who had been standing by, silent and lowering, pulling at his mustache and fondly regarding its silken ends with downward glances.

"Ceremonies are unnecessary, sir," he growled.

"I thought you liked them." The Vagabond could not resist the goad, and he continued to smile as he spoke.

Southbridge raised his glove as if he would strike the Northerner in the face, but lowered it and turned on his heel.

"I trust that we shall meet again where there are no ladies present," he called, after the Vagabond was mounted.

"My dear sir, if we do I assure you that I shall not be frightened away by the waving of your plume or the jingling of your spurs."

On his way back to Alexandria the Vagabond both smiled and scowled. He smiled broadly over Southbridge's uniform; he smiled raptly over new obstacles, having nothing to do with a mine, a mountain, or war, which he must overcome; he scowled over the amenities of sectionalism that might influence purely personal relations.

"I shall see her again soon," he said, and tossed his head and whistled.

XX

WITH EVERY MAN'S DUTY PLAIN

A set speech by the Judge always mustered all the devotees of oratory within the radius of a day's comfortable drive. His subject on this Tuesday following the fall of Sumter was a magnet no less than curiosity to know how the leading Democrat and most popular citizen of the county stood on the issue that a cannon-shot had precipitated. To all men, though they had talked for months of the eventuality, the news came as a family disaster that should be discussed in family council, in the court-house square; for the town-meeting instinct was still strong in the land.

So they came charging "On to Richmond" as fast as their horses could bring them; more than one sheepish-looking fellow with a woman in the buggy beside him who, willy nilly, was going to see that her husband, brother, or son did not enlist. Never in all the times that the Judge had stood on the stone steps had he been so rhetorical or so eloquent in his convincing loyalty to the flag as in his bold front to any man or set of men who fired on it. He had the audience at a fever heat of palpitation. The sentences of his peroration were following one another in rhythmic poise, when suddenly he paused, as if memory were at fault

THE VAGABOND

or he was transfixed by some thought not rehearsed in his study, and then continued in a conversational tone of rare force, addressed to each hearer, personally:

"We have no regular army of account. Our forefathers fought for a country not to be ruled by bayonets, uniforms, or a privileged class. On that stake, Washington, the richest man in America, risked his all. They gave each of us an equal proprietary right in the Government which individual success or influence could not assault. If this experiment among nations was endangered, they depended upon the virile manhood and the moral gratitude and appreciative self-respect of the citizen to fly to its defence. The hour of peril is here. The hour is here when every man, however rich, however poor, must follow the example of Washington; when he must leave the comforts and the benefices that the sacrifices of his sires assured and place his life at the call of that flag which embodies his sacred privilege and the united people whose power can alone protect it; land-owner shoulder to shoulder with tenant, scholar with the unlettered, in the common cause which is of vital personal interest to each of us; otherwise, we are unworthy of our heritage."

His words were so sharp, his manner so mandatory, his feeling so intense, that the hush of thoughtfulness took the place of a cheer, except for one drunken man, Hosea Pillsbury by name, swaying on the outskirts of the crowd, who called in a thick voice:

"Shooray, Jedge! Pratish what you preesh! You got no fam'lysh; why don't'sh you 'listsh? Why don't you go fightsh for your country yourselfsh? Ha! ha! Joksh!"

THE VAGABOND

Some of the audience hissed; the features of others worked in a suppressed smile. All were amazed to find the smartest man in the county at a loss for a reply. When finally it came, it was spoken pleasantly, sweetly:

"Such is the republic," he said, "that even a drunken man may show a sober man his duty. Thank you, my friend. I *shall* enlist."

The crowd made a path for him in wonder as he walked not to the enrolling officer of the infantry company, but to him of the First Belmore Cavalry, whose captain was the Vagabond; first lieutenant, Jimmy Pool; second lieutenant, Timothy Booker—and put down his name as a private.

The nephew alone was not astounded by the Judge's action. That five hundred dollars intrusted to Tim Booker had assured him long ago that there were deep waters under the Judge's rhetoric. Directly, he found himself raised over the heads of the cheering crowd, now intoxicated with enthusiasm, to the steps of the court-house, where he rose to his feet with shaking knees under the fearful fire of calls for a speech.

"All I've got to say," he said, "is that no man is good enough to own another man, and if we let any State secede when it has a grievance we sha'n't have a nation; we shall have only a disunion of grievances;" and the Vagabond slipped back down the steps in great embarrassment.

Nor was the crowd content yet. It caught sight of the white hairs of the arbiter of the cavalry's recruiting booth. The strong hands that had borne the Vagabond aloft now made fond seizure of Captain Herick, who was at once embarrassed and belligerent.

THE VAGABOND

"Fellow-soldiers—er—fellow—citizens," he said, "the talking's over. This ain't any time to quote long words from the dictionary. It's time to fight and obey orders; and orders, gentlemen, orders are given, sir, without any pretension to oratory, sir. We want all the good men, all the men that don't think they know it all. We want men like the Judge here—the Judge who's got enough learning in his head to drown me, sir—men who know they've got a big job on hand and they've got to begin at the primer of soldiering. Any man that's just thinking how pretty he'll look in his uniform, and how the girls'll tease him for brass buttons; any man that thinks he hasn't the hardest kind of work before him and hardship and suffering that makes a man a man—why, we'll give him his belly-ache medicine now and sit him on the hotel porch where his criticism of his superiors won't do any harm. Yes, sir, we'll just push him out of the road like a stone that blocks the wheels. Any good man that stays at home, I hope the women folks'll make him get his own victuals and sew on his own pants buttons.

"You fellows that are good wrestlers needn't think that any rebel is going to wait for you to get a side hold of him. The fellow wins that hits the other first and hardest—with a musket ball, sir, not a putty ball, sir. To lick a man with your fists you've got to know how. To lick him in war, sir, you've got to know how a d——d sight better. The only way to know how is to drill, drill. Drill hard and fight hard and we'll save the Union, by the Eternal!"

The example of the Bench had completed the roster of the infantry company, after filling the vacant places

THE VAGABOND

in the cavalry, which had been recruited chiefly of Californians and of other men hardened by contact with the world away from home, who had appeared out of the blue as a result of a line in the New York papers. All argument to persuade the Judge to accept a discharge failed. He was adamant. His sole request was that the drunkard, Pillsbury, should be transferred from infantry to comradeship with one who proposed to make a sober and useful cavalry-man of him.

No private followed the directions of Drill-master Herrick with the attention of the eldest and most corpulent trooper. Not until the morning before the departure of the company for Washington did he ask for leave. Then he "spruced" his new uniform before the glass in his living-room that adjoined his office and proceeded toward the Hope house. If it goes without saying that his sacrifice of position made the sincerity of his enlistment indubitable, it was none the less natural that he should have fond hopes of its effect in certain quarters. The day was sunny, and Miss Felicia happened to be on the porch. She was nettled at sight of the truant, who had not asked her advice as to his course or even come to explain it to her.

"Whose orderly are you?" she asked.

"Nobody's. I'm only a private yet," he replied.

Instead of touching it in military fashion, as he had intended, he lifted the little fatigue cap that sat ridiculously on his high brow, whereupon he was plunged in doubt as to whether or not he had set it back with the proper rake.

"Oh, indeed!"

"What—what do you think of my uniform?"

THE VAGABOND

His effort to ask the question playfully was dismal, for the advantage of composure was now on her side.

"I should say that there was either too little cloth or too much man."

"I—I left room to—grow smaller, and I am growing—smaller;" as he was by several pounds, thanks to the exercise of drilling.

All that he had read about the charm of brass buttons for the fair sex appealed to him as a black lie. He dropped to the steps, his dignity gone.

"Yes," she observed, "privates, I believe, are not supposed to sit on chairs."

He removed that little fatigue cap altogether; he mopped his brow.

"I saw you in your carriage when I made my speech. What did you think of it?" he asked, finally, after a silence that was torture to him, but seemed to agree with her.

"The last part was very fine; very much matter and very few words."

"Strange! strange! Thank you. And the part where I referred to the Constitution as a full-rigged ship?"

"The ship? Oh, yes. Pretty much in your usual style."

The same that everybody else had said. There had not been a single figure in that impassioned peroration that had taken the place of studied pauses and ruined the force of his oration, leaving him still with the feeling of one who has broken a fine piece of china. Why, he had only talked as he would to a friend in his office! Strange, strange!

"I see," he said, hopefully, thinking he had light.

THE VAGABOND

"People liked it and you liked it because I practised what I preached."

"Never! never!" she replied, decisively. "The Judge of the county a private! Where is your sense of proportion? Is this the most you, with your education and position and—and supposed ability—can do—to carry a rifle; not even raise a company? I hope you will recover your senses yet. There is still time to get a discharge."

This was the last straw. The Judge lost his temper.

"I propose to stick to my resolution, Miss Hope," he said, dramatically, as he rose and slapped his cap on his head askew. "Good-morning."

"Good-morning, *Private Williams!*"

With his hands thrust deep into his pockets and his head stubbornly bent, he made a most unmilitary figure, which took its way defiantly out of the yard.

"I didn't know he could be so gritty," she remarked to herself, a faint smile flickering on her lips.

The next day, as the Belmore cavalry passed through a lane of bunting and cheers, Trooper Williams—Hosea Pillsbury at his elbow—saw Felicia waving a flag; and the line halting for a second as he was opposite her carriage, he heard her exclaim, "Silly!" without knowing at all what she meant by that.

XXI

TO HER DOOR BY FORCE

In making up that company its leader selected men who, primarily, had the manner and the reputation of being anything but quitters, either plain, cheap, or derved cheap. When it was first mustered in line, Drill-master Herrick described the assembled hundred as an independent lot of generals acting as privates; but he thought they'd do for cavalry, being an infantry-man himself and secretly disappointed at the Vagabond's choice of arm.

Father Bob drilled them without regard to whether their shirt-backs were fast dyed or not, drilled them until they knew how to form column and deploy and that their Captain was "Sir" and not "Cap" or even "Cap'n." At his final inspection he said they were like baking-powder bread—they'd have to do inasmuch as there was no time to set yeast. With this parting shot, the old man passed on, by General Scott's order, to assist a West Point cadet in disciplining a green regiment of infantry; for in that time anyone who knew the manual of arms found himself a power in the land, and the brilliant young orator in the late elections took lessons from a private of regulars.

If the Vagabond's fondness for riding, his love of motion were not enough, the picture—one of the most

THE VAGABOND

precious of a cherished gallery of impressions—that Volilla made on Folly alone would have decided him in favor of the cavalry. The pleasantest feature of his new duties was his choice of that dumb ally who was to share danger and triumph with him. He looked at scores of horses before he found a suitable one, a sturdy, clean-limbed but not spider-limbed bay, a hand higher and a hundred pounds heavier than any other in his command. After their first gallop together, the Vagabond thought of the onrushing surf. "Breaker is your name," he said, as he tapped the white star on the forehead. He watched over Breaker as a father does over a child; he trained him till he could take a fence as vigorously as, if less gracefully than, Folly, or, on the word, would fall down and lie as quiet as the sea in a calm.

From the character of its leader, which its troopers shared, and from its faculty of vouchsafing itself at any time or place with the slouching preparedness and good-humor of veterans, the company was soon known throughout the army as the Vagabonds. In the ensuing weeks after Sumter's fall, they did everything but fight and the one thing that their Captain most wanted to do, namely, make a scout in the neighborhood of the Lanley house. They rode to Harper's Ferry and back; they rode into Maryland; they escorted generals up and down that long line on the southern side of the Potomac which was being daily augmented by new forces and being whipped out of village militia companies into a composite thing. It was not war any more than the tuning of the orchestra is a ball. There cannot be war without armies; and the armies were yet in making.

THE VAGABOND

"The ring-master snaps his whip and round and round the ring we go," growled Tim Booker, "jumping through hoops and over bars and turning somersaults and kissing our hands to the ladies; but don't let the little boy blue hear the crack of a rifle. It might give him a headache. Why I ever left the eternal hills of California——"

"You wait; you wait, Timothy," said Jimmy Pool, in his languid drawl. "You may get a stomachful of lead for breakfast one of these mornings. The fatted ox never dreams that the butcher is sharpening his knife for him."

"Jimmy Pool," said Tim, wrathfully, "you go hang your wet cloth out to dry. I've got to blaze up once in a while or I'll explode."

There were times when the Vagabond, always used to choosing his own trail and his own camp for the night, was sorely tempted by Tim's scheme of strategy, which was simplicity itself, being nothing more or less than to ride through to New Orleans and end the war at once. "Besides, we'll be part way back to 'Frisco," Tim added, as a further attraction.

What most appealed to the Vagabond was that the flight would not be monotonous while it lasted, and he could pay a call before he reached the enemy's lines. While he promenaded and drilled, his story was untold—and the girl was only a few hours away. As disingenuously as he might, he suggested to the staff officer of engineers that he had a little talent for topography and drawing, and he was promptly made a scout at another part of the lines. He even hinted to General Husted, his brigade commander, that he would like to ride out to see what was in front of him.

THE VAGABOND

In reply the General made a burring sound through his mustache and said nothing.

Then one afternoon came to his tent Maxim, of the staff, accompanied by a man in a linen duster, with its bottom mud-stained and flying behind him. The Vagabond's first impression of Mr. Aikens was that he was green; and it was inevitable that he should not like any man of that complexion, with stooped shoulders, whining voice, and the apologetic manner of a weather-vane. No sooner had he read the first sentence of the order that Maxim brought, than strangers and linen dusters passed into oblivion.

“ALEXANDRIA, June 18, 1861.

“CAPTAIN WILLIAM WILLIAMS:

“At dawn to-morrow morning you will proceed with your company to the Lanley plantation. Mr. Aikens, who was formerly an overseer on that plantation, knows the country and is at your disposal. If necessary and your force is adequate, you will push in any outposts in your way. If your force is inadequate, you will immediately report the fact to me. Your main business is to get as accurate a map as possible of the country to the south of Lanleyton; incidentally, to glean information. From this point, which is the highest ground in the region, you will be in sight of the enemy's camp. As soon as the enemy is apprised of your presence you will likely be attacked in force by cavalry. I believe that there is a signal-man in the cupola of the house. This fact, taken in connection with a detached outpost, some distance on this side of the house, may mean any one of a number of things. I leave you to ascertain what.

THE VAGABOND

"You must hold your own until you have accomplished your purpose. The time that you will have to do this depends upon your quickness of observation and your facility with your pencil. I may add that the map is of extreme importance, so you may govern yourself accordingly.

"By order,

"JAMES H. HUESTED, Brig.-Gen., U. S. V.,
"Commanding the Second Brigade, Third Division."

Maxim smiled as he watched the Vagabond devour the lines of this officially polite invitation to death or success.

"Look out for old Ginger Southbridge!" (who was of Maxim's class at the Point.) "He's all rigged out in Spanish spurs, plume and sash, and he and his cavalry are riding up and down like the wrath of God, on the look-out for the like of you and yours. Wish I was going with you. Success!"

Meanwhile, from sheer force of habit, Aikens's shifting eyes had made note of everything in his host's tent. At that moment he was as unconscious as the Vagabond of the part he was to play against his new acquaintance. It was soon evident that he was a better observer of human surroundings than of topography. Were the banks of this creek so high as to prevent the rapid passage of cavalry in extended order? Was the house visible from that grove? Really, the informant did not know. In extenuation of his ignorance, which searching questions had developed, the man in the linen duster fell back upon the phrase which had profited him well in New England, where he had appeared before abolition societies as the overseer who had sacrificed his position from conscientious

THE VAGABOND

scruples. Of course the truth was that he had been discharged for brutality to the field-hands and worse.

"Oh, I spent a miserable time on that place! The young lady who owns it—not until you know the South can you understand how cruel she was to the poor black——"

"She was not cruel!" The Vagabond, who seldom flew into a passion, was in a savage one now. The very assertion, above all from a green man in a linen duster, that the girl of his heart's desire was anything but gentle, did not admit of thought or discussion. "You lie, Mr. Aikens, you lie!"

Cringing, Aikens longed for nothing so much as the courage to resent this sudden and amazing outburst from a quarter whence he little expected it; but it was not in him, and, therefore, a new grudge was born in the camp-follower's heart.

"I beg your pardon, Captain," he said.

"And you know you lied," came the uncompromising corollary.

"Perhaps I was prejudiced—I—I exaggerated."

With that the Vagabond closed the interview and forgot Aikens as he hastened to Jimmy and Tim with the news.

When the Vagabonds learned that there was action afoot, they prepared for it by doing many things that would have made them smile after they became veterans. They rubbed the hilts of their sabres; they ran their thumbs along the blades; they examined each part of their accoutrements; their fingers crept up and down their horses' legs in reassurance, all being accompanied by that subdued because overdone banter of men who expect to go under fire.

At midnight a line of shadowy forms on the edge

THE VAGABOND

of the camp awaited the word. In double file, their sabres held so that they would not clank, every man watching the one in front of him, now in the shadow of groves, again in ravines, no word spoken except an oath smothered in a whisper to a trooper who lighted a cigar, keeping to the sod and avoiding roads which would be sounding-boards for horses' hoofs, they rode five miles by angles and circles for one mile as the crow flies. Finally they halted in a clump of woods as definitely as a coach before an inn. Dismounted and resting on the ground, Jimmy Pool ventured the first remark not purely of practical significance.

"D——n well done!" he whispered. It was the strongest word of praise in his vocabulary and he used it rarely.

"D——n pretty puzzle!" growled Tim. "Far's I know, we're back in Maryland. Probably got to escort some governor of a State to a cemetery to hunt for a rabbit's foot. Needn't tell me we're going to fight. Fight! Here am I, an able-bodied American citizen, a Californian, a miner glued up in a uniform and dangling a sabre and drawing a bootblack's pay, when I might be back in the eternal hills of——"

"Not so loud," Jimmy warned him; and "Wait, Timothy."

Thus they did wait upon the rising of the curtain of night, rehearsing to themselves in silence the parts they were to play, all carefully arranged beforehand by their leader. With the flush that heralds the dawn they sprang softly into their saddles, as if they were under oath not to awaken the sleeping world. Here and there was the rustle of leather or the thud of an impatient hoof. In answer to a low whistle, a line of knees pressed the horses' sides and the charge began.

THE VAGABOND

The Confederate outpost, awakened by the tumult that had broken out of the darkness and solitude, were rubbing their eyes when shadowy forms began to pass over them and they dodged iron heels and sabre thrusts. The Vagabonds had an instant's view of the camp, such as one gets of a village from a balloon hard driven by the wind. Everyone made a cut at one reclining form or another, as a boy catches at the ring from the wooden steed of a merry-go-round. If he failed of his object his chance was gone, and with blade uplifted he found himself borne on across the fields, with the first shots of the surprised enemy crackling behind.

On up the slope toward the house they rode, never slackening pace when the company divided into three parts, one going to the left, one to the right, of the park, while the third, with the Vagabond at its head, dashed under the trees. He had disposed his little force in a semicircle of three points, prepared to fall back as soon as his work was done, while he was to ascend to the cupola of the house where the trees could not hide his view and the surrounding country would be a panorama before his eyes. The enemy's outpost could not reach them before the map was made, and in returning they could go as they had come, on the gallop, careless of obstacles. No sooner had they debouched from the grove than the signal-man stationed in the cupola was waving the flag that announced their attack. By a coincidence, Southbridge's cavalry was in the saddle about to start on an entirely different mission, but welcoming with a shout the one which circumstances provided.

It also happened that Miss Lanley was up and dressing. If she were to ride at all in comfort these hot

THE VAGABOND

days she must start at sun-up. When she heard the thunder of hoof-beats she supposed that Southbridge was making another one of his practice runs for the good of his men and the peace of his own conscience. Their foaming horses sent the gravel flying and their accoutrements jingled with the sudden halt of the little cavalcade at the door.

"Now out under those trees and hold fast till you hear from me!" cried the Vagabond, passing his reins to his orderly as he sprang to earth.

His men trotted on. He took two or three steps and then stopped as abruptly as if he had been struck. Miss Lanley stood before him on the threshold.

"It's *you*!" she exclaimed in horror.

That "*you*" was intensely personal. It embraced at once her hatred of the invader and her shock that any Federal soldier should be so far South with his sabre still on his belt. She made him feel juvenile and contemptible.

"The fortunes of war! A month ago I was a guest here."

"Pardon!" she interrupted, icily, frowning at the word.

"I mean, you were very nice to me while your smith shod my horse. To-day my General has sent me to make a map from your cupola."

"I will not permit it," she replied, in the tone of one closing a discussion with a protesting servant.

In her start at sight of him she had withdrawn a step. Recovering herself, she advanced again and fairly barred the way. Her head was thrown back, her thin nostrils were playing with her defiant

THE VAGABOND

breaths, and her eyes, their pupils contracted to two small points of flame, met his steadily. There were no flying sparks, no cattishness. Her anger was as serene as white heat. He forgot his mission in contemplation of the picture she made.

"Heavens! but you are beautiful when you look that way!" he said, so simply that the truth shone through every word.

She raised her hunting-crop as if she would strike him with all her strength. Realizing instantly how his words must have sounded to her, he determined to receive the blow; for he felt that he deserved it. She let her arm fall and stepped to one side.

"Let force prevail where a gentleman would not!"

"A thousand pardons! What I said was true, true, true! And that's why I said it," he declared, as again realizing the pressing importance of every second, he started up the stairs three at a bound.

Instantly his back was turned, she ran into the yard where she could see the cupola, in pursuance of a plan, the conception of which had led her to yield.

The Vagabond had overlooked the fact that he might have a signal-man to deal with and was oblivious of any fresh danger. When he found himself on the platform flush with the roof, from which the cupola was entered by half a dozen steps on the opposite side from the stairway, as suddenly as an indicator flies up on a switch a revolver was flashed in his face.

"Up with your hands, Yank!" cried the signal-man.

"Just as you say," the Vagabond responded, and he raised his palms abjectly.

At the same moment he dodged his head back behind one of the octagonal sides of a structure which

THE VAGABOND

had advantages for a game of hide-and-seek. That surprised the signal-man a little. It was like catching a squirrel by the tail and finding that the rest of him had fled. He had nothing to shoot at except two hands. Directly, one of those disappeared, and he understood what it was after. So he pushed his revolver slowly forward, his head at a safe distance behind it. It did not require as skilful a marksman as the Vagabond to hit the tanned hand which was only two feet away. There was a report and the signal-man's weapon fell to the floor, while at the sight of a gleaming barrel and a smiling face behind it he threw his head back as suddenly as if someone had unexpectedly stuck a pin in his chin.

"Now," said his captor, "step back to your place. I prefer your company to having you lie in wait for me on the stairs. Not to mention that I've got a revolver, I'm bigger and stronger than you, my boy; so you better be reconciled."

"Oh, I'm as good as preachin'! Durn my skin if ever any blue-belly'll fool me again that a way. I acted as though that revolver of mine could see."

"No, your mistake was in coming down to meet me. You ought to have leaned out of the cupola window and caught me as I appeared at the head of the stairs."

"M-m-m! That's right," said the signal-man, as he bound up his thumb with his handkerchief.

A glance showed the enemy's tents a field of mushrooms on the plain beyond; it showed how easy was the Vagabond's task if he had time for it; and it showed something more—a line of cavalry moving away from camp.

"Signal to that cavalry to wait, that it needs infan-

THE VAGABOND

try to support it—that we have ten guns and five thousand men! Quick, or I'll—" he said, fiercely, to the signal-man.

The prisoner picked up his flag with most unseemly alacrity, and grinned maliciously.

"Sure pop!" he said. "But you kin wave all the table-spreads in the world and you kin't stop Ginger Southbridge when the General's give him a chance to go somewhar. Mister Yank, you and your blue-bellies down thar'll have to walk to Richmond while Confeds ride your nags."

The Vagabond's real desire was to save Southbridge the trouble of coming so far; to go out to meet him half-way. But desires have little place in war. He was outnumbered six to one. His orders were to make the map and go, and the time left for that was the three or four minutes that it would require that galloping column to arrive. If he resisted, there would be a scrimmage.

And Volilla! She would be under fire. She would see men wounded and dying on her very door-step. His sense of chivalry became alive to possibilities that had not occurred to him before. It was enough to have forced his way into her house without making her lawn a battle-field. Seizing the whistle which he used for giving signals to his men, he blew the call of withdrawal; and realizing that if he was to accompany them no time was to be lost, he started back down the stairs, solacing himself with the idea that he could make a map from memory.

From the yard, after the signal-man had all too impetuously acted on her information, Volilla, in chagrin that made her stamp her foot, had seen the abject

THE VAGABOND

prisoner of one moment the buoyant captor of the next. Though she could not see him clearly, she was sure that he swaggered in actor fashion; that he smiled with vexatious confidence. She felt as if she had been personally baffled. The blood tingled in the lobes of her little ears. Her desire to teach this impudent circus-rider of a man a lesson, to humiliate him in his turn, outweighed every other consideration.

She ran back into the house, her imagination soaring and falling as she conceived and dismissed plans. Bulwer's pistol, hanging on the rack, fairly leaped at her with a suggestion that made her temples throb in exultation. She seized it and ran up the stairs, meeting the Vagabond just at the head of the flight leading from the cupola. Thus far she had been perfectly certain of herself. She was used to fire-arms, but not to taking prisoners. She felt her heart beating tumultuously and her hand trembling, though her brain bade it be still, as she pointed the weapon straight into his face.

"Surrender!"

Trying to speak the word steadily, her ears told her that the *r*'s were blurred in a pitching tremolo.

And he? To her increased rage and distraction, he smiled at that black muzzle and at her, as much as to say that he knew she was only playing. For in the new demonstration he had found quite another side of her to admire, and he forgot again that his safety depended upon haste.

"I have already," he said, pleasantly.

"To him, yes," she said; "now to me!"

He inclined his head gently in compliance.

"I have already to *you*—the first time I saw you!"

THE VAGABOND

he cried, unconscious of all save her and his love for her.

Because it stiffened her anger, she almost thanked him for this crowning impudent thrust of his nonchalance (as it seemed to her). She saw that her hand no longer trembled. Afterward she recalled that the sight was fairly between his eyes and that she had thought that a little too brutal. She lowered it until it covered his breast, while he still smiled at her determination.

"Throw your revolver out of the window there, or I fire!"

He saw that she would be as good as her word, and, still smiling, he did as he was bid, while her attention was for an instant diverted by the movement. His weapon left his fingers as they were near the muzzle of her own weapon, the barrel of which he suddenly grasped, and, swerving it to one side, held it there steadily, making her most sensible of her powerlessness without having exerted his masculine strength roughly, while he continued to smile pleasantly.

"Necessity requires," he said, softly, as to a partner in a dance. "If it were only you and not your soldiers who wanted me, though I were in an arsenal, you could have me by lifting your finger."

As jauntily as they would have swung in a minuet, he passed around his indignant adversary, his last glimpse being of blazing eyes and set lips. She let her revolver fall to a level with his back, little thinking that her safety had impelled his retreat. There was an instant of irresolution which seemed an hour to her, and she did not fire.

At the door was the section of his company imme-

THE VAGABOND

diately under his command, while on the road he caught glimpses of the others at the trot. He picked up his own revolver from the spot where it had fallen when he threw it out of the window, calling to the men to proceed. As he swung into the saddle he heard yells of delight joined to the thunderous hoof-song of the Virginia Firsts. They bore a personal message to him. They seemed to say:

"Oh, you are running away—running away from Southbridge—yes, from Southbridge—before you have made that map. What are you going to tell the General? That there was a girl and you couldn't? How many times more are you going to change your mind? Are you going to confess failure in face of the General's order, when you haven't had a man scratched? You'll get another chance, oh, yes, *you* will—a chance to guard piles of hardtack!"

Already the first of his file of twos was passing under the trees at the entrance to the road. They were calling "Look out for your heads!" and as soon as the way was clear they drove in their spurs and broke for safety with all speed. When he saw the man ahead of him reach up to push aside the twigs, the Vagabond's inspiration and opportunity came. He grasped the overhanging limb of the elm and swung himself upon it.

"I've got to finish that map. If I don't return, you'll find it in a crotch of the tree," he called to his startled orderly.

XXII

FOLLY TAKES BREAKER'S PLACE

Precipitately, he slid along the limb and lifted himself upon the one above, so that his dangling legs would not be a signal of his predicament. From this position, jubilant in the conviction that his own company had too much of a lead to be caught, he watched the Confederates sweep through the park in a whirlwind of shouts and crunching gravel, leaving the twigs that had whipped the men's faces quivering. Soon he heard a scattering rifle-fire and knew that Southbridge had halted his men in order to speed the parting guest with a few charges of lead. Then Southbridge rode back in a rage that his orders permitted him to go no farther. If they had, he would have ridden clear to the Union lines, though he had not gained an inch on the way. He dismounted his men and he himself stepped upon the porch. Volilla was visible in the door-way over the back of Sir Knight as he swept the floor with his plume. Such a radiant smile as she now bestowed upon another was the Vagabond's haunting ambition and hope. It would have been better for his peace of mind if he had not seen this or heard her greeting of his pursuer.

"A heroic relief!" she cried.

"Not a bit of it," the Vagabond thought, savagely. Then he heard Southbridge say:

THE VAGABOND

"You will find the Virginia Firsts always on hand. We never sleep. We are always in the saddle, always riding, for then no chance will escape us. I shall not rest till the last invader is off our soil."

"They ran at sight of you," she said, whether out of admiration for Southbridge or contempt for the Federals the Vagabond was at a loss to determine.

"As for this California adventurer, Williams"—adventurer! it is hard for a brave man to be called that and remain silent, especially when he is a-straddle of a limb—"I shall catch him yet, easily, quite easily," Southbridge concluded, with as much nonchalance as if he meant a train.

"Will you!" said the Vagabond, softly, rolling the morsel on his tongue. "Hm-m-m, will you!"

Here, Bulwer, dust-covered, came riding swiftly up, his errand being the safety of his mother, who was staying at Lanleyton. The three went into the house, Southbridge ascending to the cupola to report by wig-wag to his General.

The Confederates had distributed themselves about in the shade, most of them to the north of the house, where the well was. A few, however, were in the Vagabond's neighborhood. One of these, casting about for a seat, dropped at the roots of the elm and leaned his back against the trunk. If he looked up, a sensation was certain. He took a chew of tobacco and his habit of mind seemed such that if the Vagabond did not attract his attention by any movement, he would be preoccupied until the juice was flowing well.

Whether the interval of security was to be long or short, the Vagabond determined to make the most of it. The very possibility of being taken before he had

THE VAGABOND

made any map at all made him forget the pain of his cramped position, which he dared not change. As he drew from memory with hasty strokes, he thought how completely he had lost his head for duty both times when he found himself alone with the girl he had carried secretly in his heart for twelve years. At last he had two matching sheets finished, and as he surveyed them he imagined he heard a military growl when the General should observe their want of detail.

"And I could have made such a fine map from the cupola if—if when I look in her eyes I don't cease to think of everything except her," he thought a little dejectedly; "and I might have busied Southbridge a bit, too."

Having crammed the pieces of paper into the crotch nearest him, he had nothing to do except to look down at the private who, perhaps magnetized by his gaze, leaned back lazily and saw something blue overhead. He blinked to dispel the illusion, vainly.

"Hello!" he said, tentatively. "Hello, *Yank!*" he added, in full conviction; and the Vagabond saw that he was about to give the alarm. Before it could take expression, the muzzle of a revolver was poked through the leaves.

"One word, my boy," the man on the limb whispered, "just one word, and you won't be at roll-call in the morning."

The private blinked again. He switched his cud from one corner of his mouth to the other with the deliberation of a ruminant, before committing himself to a line of action.

"That's a good talk," he replied, "only you won't. You shoot me and you'll be killed as dead as a door-

THE VAGABOND

nail. I reckon you'd ruther be a live prisoner, eh, Yank?"

"It depends," Billy responded, with the assumption of desperate cynicism. "It's less trouble in a scrimmage than to be shot with ceremony. I'm not going to be taken alive, that's certain. So much for me. You're the interested party, Johnny Reb. It makes a lot of difference to you—just the difference of whether you go with your comrades or go to kingdom come this minute. I'll take as much as I lose. I'll tally one, anyway. Yes, I'll get you sure, fair between the eyes, and I think I can fix that fellow with the week-old beard yonder, too."

Nothing more affects the personal equation than a small black spot in a circle of steel with a sight above it and a clear eye beyond that. The Vagabond cocked his revolver with a click that was as suggestive as the roar of Niagara Falls.

"All right," the private whispered. "Don't shoot, Yank! It's a bargain."

"And you aren't going to mention it, now or afterward?"

"Nope."

"I know your word's good," Billy said, and dropped the revolver to his knee.

"Afterward?" The private grinned. "Say, I'd be a nice kind of galoot to tell the Colonel I seen a Yank but didn't take him 'cause he got his gun up first. Not me! Why, the joke's on *me*!" And he broke into a guffaw which was misery to the Vagabond's ears.

"What you larfin' about?" called another Confederate.

"At the way old Ginger ripped and tore over his

THE VAGABOND

orders," was the perfectly innocent reply. Then he reached into his pocket and brought forth a roll of fine cut. Renewing his cud, he said: "Yank, it ain't none of my business, but I'd like to know how you happen to be a-straddle of that limb?"

"The limb just picked me up—unexpectedly."

"Wasn't very used to riding, was you? Most of you Northerners have been clerks and constables and shoe-makers, ain't you? Crackey! You'd think you was sitting on a pair of boils, though, if you had to follow old Ginger Southbridge for a day. Not much cavalry, either, have you? There's one lot I heard of under a fellow named Williams that's right smart, though. Old Ginger's just waitin' to gather 'em in. If the General'd only let us go, we Tigers'd have the Virginia jails full of Yanks. That fellow Williams must be a skunk. He's from California, I hear. Now California ought to keep out of this war. It ain't right for a man from way out there to interfere. Ginger'll get Williams yet; you see if he don't."

The fun of the thing was irresistible; the Vagabond revealed his identity.

"G-a-w-d!" exclaimed the private, his cud held in suspension on his tongue. Just "G-a-w-d" and nothing more!

"That's no excuse for breaking your agreement, though," added the Vagabond, coming back to a sense of his position.

"You look here, Billyums," replied the private, "you ain't no officer to me. I called you a skunk and that's what you are, mixing up in other folks's wars. And I want to tell you right now, Billyums"—the play on the name seemed to afford the private his one

THE VAGABOND

consolation—"that a Virginian's word's as good as any blue-bellied Yank's that ever walked."

Here the sound of the bugle made them both look toward the porch, where the two officers and Miss Lanley had reappeared.

"G-a-w-d! To think that Ginger's that near to you and don't know it!" His comrades were hastening to mount, and, as he arose, the private paid his farewell respects to the man in the tree. "You made a monkey of me and don't you think I don't know it, Billyums. Of course you wouldn't have shot me! You just go to h——l! I'll get even with you yet!"

"I think you're a good fellow and thank you very much," the Vagabond responded.

Putting his thumb to his nose in a most impolite gesture, the private rode to his place in the line.

Southbridge was giving orders in a grandiloquent tone. For Miss Lanley's praise, he formed his men in close order, the gray mass stretching across the whole open space to the very edge of the trees.

"A review in my honor! This is too much!" thought the Vagabond, as with critical eye he measured the strength of that fine body of soldiery.

Southbridge was standing on the porch, with one gauntleted hand holding his hat and the other on his sword-hilt. His orderly at the foot of the steps held his horse, and strapped to the orderly's saddle was the one superfluous article in that regiment's accoutrements—its commander's guitar. He looked up and down his columns with searching dignity until the lines were all rectified. Then he passed the word, and every sabre flashed out, making a field of rigid, gleaming steel points. He turned to Miss Lanley with

THE VAGABOND

a bow—the bow of the equestrian who has jumped through a flaming ring in the circus, thought the Vagabond contemptuously—and she impulsively threw a kiss at the whole command, which every trooper caught rapturously out of the corner of his eye.

“Three cheers for your commander!” she called.

They did not cheer. They broke into that terrible yell whose echoes for four years rose and fell, from the Mississippi to Hampton Roads, with the fortunes of their cause.

“That’s better than cheering,” said Southbridge. “A man stops when he cheers. I don’t want the Virginia Firsts ever to have the idea that they are to be still. Cheering is all very well for gunners and quartermasters,” and he cast a glance at Bulwer, who was now a colonel of artillery.

With that, he bowed again; the sabres went shucking home into their scabbards, and he remounted and in columns of twos the Tigers started down the drive, a band of sinewy, determined men on sinewy horses, with the spirit of corps written large on every face—fellow Americans, that’s all.

“They’ll have to push these twigs out of the way and then they’ll look up and see me,” thought the Vagabond.

He sprang to the other side of the trunk, and, clinging with hands and knees, waited in suspense until the last file had passed and he knew that he had been unobserved. Then he seated himself again in the crotch to think over the situation; and, having once more a view of the house through the foliage, he saw that Volilla and Bulwer had left the porch. If he started for the Union lines he might fall into the

THE VAGABOND

hands of the outpost. For that enterprise, then, night was best; while as yet it was only six in the morning, not to mention that his seat was none too comfortable. Apparently, Southbridge by order had withdrawn for good, leaving only Bulwer and the signal-man to dispute possession with him. At that moment she, of whom he craved only an hour's listening, might be alone. Within grasp was the chance which might not be his for many months or even years, should the war last that long. He could apologize for the rudeness of the morning; he could tell the whole story of his fancy for a mountain, a mine and a girl—one girl—the only one. As for Bulwer, his capture and release would enforce his desired absence.

He was about to descend from the tree when he saw a carriage with two riding-horses, one with a Confederate saddle-cloth and the other Miss Lanley's, coming from the stable. Mrs. Bulwer, on the arm of her son and looking as if she resented action at so early an hour, appeared in the door-way, with Volilla just behind them. After Mrs. Bulwer was snugly fixed on the cushions, the other two mounted. Josephus cracked his whip, an event which seemed of little interest to the two fat old horses, which started off at a walk.

For the Vagabond, mother and son, carriage and driver, were so many supernumeraries. His gaze, as steady in its course as a planet, followed the graceful horsewoman down the drive. If she had looked up as she ducked under the limb she might have seen him. There was no use of denying to himself that she was going beyond the Confederate lines, where she would be as unapproachable as if she were in China. When

THE VAGABOND

should he see her again, now? How long would his story have to wait?

"Honestly, I did want another word just to change your impression of this morning," he said, half aloud, to the retreating figure. "I beg your pardon for many things. Please don't think I'm as bad as I acted."

A group of negroes who had watched the departure hurried back to the out-buildings, thinking it unwise to be abroad in such troublous times. The house had the peculiar aspect of desertion of one that has been left in haste. Through the wide-open door and windows he could see the polished floors and the old-fashioned furniture. Why shouldn't he make his map at leisure from his chosen vantage-point? He slipped down from his perch with the relief of one released from prison. Under cover of the trees he reached the porch and then tiptoed up the stairs unobserved. Adroitly, by soft approach, he again succeeded in taking the occupant of the cupola by surprise.

"Are you makin' reg'lar inspections of this place?" asked the signal-man, as he handed over his revolver with his left hand, the other being bandaged.

"Why?"

"'Cause, if you are, I'm goin' to ask for reinforcements. Think I need a flanking party right over yonder." He pointed to a spur on the roof that commanded the cupola.

"That's a good-sized left hand you have. Suppose you sit there yourself. I don't want you quite so near. Of course, if you try any tricks, I'll shoot promptly."

"Anything t' oblige. You don't mind if I play mumblety-peg to pass the time?"

THE VAGABOND

"Good! I see you are a soldier who accepts the inevitable without a snarl."

Surveying again the broad vista which the cupola afforded, he noticed behind the hills and trees to the right of the great open field between the house and the enemy's camp the movement of a column toward the north. This was undoubtedly information for the General; but his first duty, the more pressing because of the folly which had delayed its execution, was the map. He settled himself to make it with the keen delight which he always took in drawing. The signalman watched him curiously, for some time in silence, and then remarked:

"Say, Yank, it's kind o' lonesome over here. If you ain't got no objection, I'd like to look over your shoulder. I won't try any shenanigan, s' help me."

Without glancing up, the draughtsman gave his consent. For some time the spectator said nothing, as he watched with circus-day wonder the swift strokes of the pencil.

"Puttin' it all down, ain't you?" he said, finally. "Say, if you don't mind answering a question I always said I'd ask the first Yank I ever met, will you please tell me what right your army's got comin' down here, when all us folks wants is to mind our own business and other folks to mind theirs?"

"We want to save the Union. We want to keep such good fellows as you in it."

"You mean you want our niggers; ain't that it, now?"

"Not with me."

"Just what I thought. I always said that *all* Yanks wasn't blue-bellied. I expect there's some like you

THE VAGABOND

who don't know what they're fightin' for. The Yankee politicians just got you worked up."

"Do *you* know what *you're* fighting for?"

"Yes, sir. For State's rights and ag'in Northern domination. What'd you do if we marched up your way and tried to run your affairs?"

"Fight."

The Confederate smiled in triumph.

"Oh, no, you wouldn't. You'd just lay down and say please, sir—you'd haf to—for the Union, wouldn't you?"

"It depends," the Vagabond said, good-humoredly. Then he asked, innocently, as he pointed with his pencil: "Does that road bend to the south or run due east?"

The keen gray eye of the signal-man twinkled knowingly.

"All that you can't see I don't know anything about," he replied.

In consequence, the Vagabond liked him better than ever and wished heartily that he and the private under the tree were in his own command. They chatted on until the last stroke was on the matching sheets, and he folded them and put them in his pocket with the consciousness that he had done his part, come what would. When he looked toward the north he discovered what the enemy had been doing in the meantime. The outpost in front of the house had been reinforced and spread out in open order. Under the screen of a clump of trees was a battery of guns (Bulwer's). He saw some scouts riding back in a ravine, where the gray patch of a body of cavalry was all but melted into the brownish earth. He recognized instantly that if

THE VAGABOND

his Vagabonds returned for the map they would be ingulfed by a superior force, against which tactics would beat out its brain and courage ply its sabre in vain. Return, for his sake if for no other cause, they would, he knew. Already they might be on the way. Night was now as distant for his purpose as the next century. On foot he stood one chance out of twenty of getting through that line which, quite ignorant of his presence, had snakily crept around him while he drew. He must try for the twentieth.

"I haven't a kingdom," he thought, "but I'd give my mine for a horse. Then I'd reach safety or they'd have me in the next ten minutes."

As he sprang down the steps of the cupola he saw a solitary figure approaching on the road. A quick glance through his glasses, and only the signal-man's presence kept him from dancing out of sheer delight. She of his heart's desire had again proved herself worthy of his highest conception. She had merely accompanied Mrs. Bulwer to a place of safety and was now returning to her home, whither duty called her. It was not entirely the thought of meeting her again that made him drum his fingers in impatience and elation until he heard her horse on the drive. Then he blessed the catch on the trap-door, which he closed after him, and, descending rapidly, reached the front door just as Miss Lanley stopped before it. When she saw him she said:

"*You again!*"

And nothing could have been more personal than her exclamation of disgust at finding him there.

He sprang forward to assist her to dismount.

"If you please." She spoke so frigidly, arbitrarily,

THE VAGABOND

that he drew back his hand and she left the saddle unassisted.

"I want to say," he began, persistently, "that whatever I did this morning war's stern rules demanded, and it was a source of pain."

"Do not suffer too much!" she exclaimed; and then, triumphantly: "Your apish tricks are at an end. You are surrounded. You cannot escape this time."

"And that," he said, recovering his pleasantry, "prevents me from telling my story now, for I have much—much to tell you. It makes it necessary, still further, to impress your hospitality. I must borrow your horse to save myself from capture."

"No! no! You cannot take Folly!" she cried. Her hands joined his on the reins. "I love this horse! No, you—savage!"

He swung round her and threw himself into the saddle with a bound.

"There, you needn't hold him any longer. I'm so sorry," he said.

She looked about helplessly for assistance.

"It's brutal, very brutal, and war is brutal," he added. His fingers slipped along the reins. "I hope I sha'n't have to go to the last resort."

"Oh!" she cried, and drew her hands away as if his were venomous. "Haven't you any consideration for a pet? They will fire at the sight of your uniform—the whole line will fire. He will be killed!"

"I don't think so; not by my desire, at least. He carries *me*. I'll care for him as if he were mine and return him, no matter at what cost, just as he is"—and he added this after the horse was in motion—

THE VAGABOND

"except that you will observe that one of the stirrups was on the wrong side and too short when I took him."

And he heard her call him a brute as he dashed down the drive.

XXIII

WAR SHOULD BE IMPERSONAL

A brute! He could not deny that his action warranted the description. Had words only been vouchsafed him to make her understand the situation—that the brazen assurance of the thief was for his friends' sake, not his own!

He realized, too, that his only favoring circumstance was due to one of her charms, her love of outdoor sport. If Folly could not have taken a fence or a gully he would have had to run past a half-company that lay concealed by the road-side. When he emerged from under the trees and saw the string of gray figures stretching across the field, he thought of the danger to the horse rather than to himself and felt much as if a mother had given her child into his care on a sinking ship. He took his cap in his hand and bent over the saddle jockey fashion to hide his tell-tale blue, whispering his very heart into the ear of Folly, who ran as if death were at his heels. The gray coats turned around on hearing the sound of hoofs and looked at the flying rider in perplexity. Was it an orderly with a message of great importance? If so, why was he not sitting erect? A few raised their rifles but put them down again, when someone passed the word that the horse was Miss Lanley's.

THE VAGABOND

All this the Vagabond saw and understood, gloating over every second of their hesitation as meaning many yards of advantage to him. Then he heard one of them shout. His blue uniform had been recognized. Before perception was turned into action he was abreast of the line. He heard the reports of three or four rifles as he swept past a private near enough to have reached him with his sabre. He knew that the greatest danger was yet to come, for he would be under the fire of a hundred men until he should pass out of range.

Then he did a thing that the girl ought to have known. He sat erect so that the enemy would aim at him instead of at Folly; and he was relieved by the thought that excited marksmen firing in haste always shoot high and by the assurance that if he fell his bearer was too valuable a prisoner to be sacrificed. Compliments went whispering by his ears; more of them sang overhead; finally, came the unmistakable croonings that tell of bullets whose energies are spent. One of these dropped in front of Folly's head into the earth with a plunk; and after that, though the line still spit puff-balls of blue smoke, none sent its messenger far enough. Laughing for joy over the safety of his borrowed rescuer, he slapped the steaming bay's shoulder in gratitude, relief, triumph, and apology.

As he pursued his way at a more leisurely gait, he was not thinking of his good fortune in being in time to warn his company or in having the map for the General; or, above all, that he had done anything clever or audacious. What else could he have done (as he would have put it)? He was thinking whether

THE VAGABOND

she was most charming when she scornfully drew away the hem of her gown, when she coolly demanded his surrender at a pistol's muzzle, or when she impulsively seized the reins to rescue her beloved hunter. His conclusion was a composite picture that made him more than ever determined to tell that story—oh, that silly, cherished story!

Meanwhile, at every turning, he half expected to see his men approaching. When he did see them, they were not alone. Evidently the General's plans had been changed and an attack in force was in preparation, for behind them in blue stretches on the dusty background were infantry and artillery hanging after a hurried march in the suspense of a halt before action. He heard his name and then huzzas. Such was his fondness for his comrades, united to him by love of adventure and true affection as well as by enlistment, that in their common shout each one seemed to be voicing his individual welcome with the mighty throat of all. He lifted his cap and felt his eyes grow moist. Joy blinded him for the moment to General Husted's presence, which the General promptly signified by riding forward and calling:

"Have you got that map?"

"Yes, sir."

"Quick! Let me see it!"

It was so large that the Vagabond put the pieces together on the sward by the road-side, while the General, throwing himself on his knees, said, "Wonderful!" and nothing more, except to pound his fist in the hollow of his hand, his favorite gesture, and to ask acutely terse and practical questions in rapid sequence, developing all that the Vagabond knew.

THE VAGABOND

"Their advance means either that they thought you'd ride into the lion's mouth again," he said, "or that they are preparing to hold that hill, or, more likely, it's a feint to attract us in force. I'll attack as ordered."

There was a faint stress on "ordered," as if he declined responsibility.

With the fist still pounding, came commands to aides and regimental commanders, so fast and so mechanical that they fairly seemed to click in rotation. Every part of the force except the Vagabonds accounted for and set in motion, he began to fold up those sheets of paper, as important to him as the rails to a train, and spoke for the first time with something of mess-table ease.

"Where did you learn to draw so well?"

"By drawing and observing, sir."

"Hm-m—a pretty good way! At some other time I should like to hear how you got yourself out of that pickle and how it was that you came riding back on a lady's saddle as gayly as a troubadour. You still have work to do to-day. I am going to dismount your men and advance them on foot."

"On foot!" He already had a cavalry-man's antipathy to this.

"Yes, in the centre of the line. You are to take the Lanley house at any cost; to man it as you would a fort; to hold it against all odds—such are my orders. You have the best shots in the command. Windows will furnish a rest for them to cover a wide range. I will send a signal-man with you and you will post him in the cupola immediately."

Though he knew that the Confederates if they

THE VAGABOND

chose could reach the hill with a greater force first, there was no suggestion in the General's tone that the task assigned to the Vagabond was not feasible. His creed, when you started to go, was to go as if you had a direct order from the Almighty, the devil was at your heels, and paradise lay within the enemy's works.

"I'd prefer—something else, sir—something else equally dangerous."

"Why?"

"It's a fine old house—and—there's—a girl in it and her old grandfather." He hung his head and began pulling blades of grass. "I don't like the idea of firing on her—or any woman."

The General regarded him narrowly and knowingly.

"Miss Lanley is pretty, and clever, too, they say. Hm-m! I presume it was her saddle-horse that you rode back."

"Yes. I took it by force."

"She will not be there when you arrive. The Confederates will see her safely out of danger."

"I am sure that she will insist upon staying."

"She may say so, think so; but the sight of a line of bayonets will change her mind."

"No, it will not" (doggedly).

The General was immensely pleased with the Vagabond's morning work and he was inclined to humor a dashing volunteer's vagaries; otherwise, he would have put the Vagabond under arrest.

"You mean to contradict your superior, sir!"

"I stated an opinion, sir. I am here to obey orders, sir."

THE VAGABOND

"Captain Williams, if every fine house with a fine girl in it was made an isolated area, we should have balls and tea-parties and not battles, and to stop a charge you would need not guns but a drawing-room and a girl. The bitterest secessionists are women, and Miss Lanley will take care of herself. We shall look after her property as if it were our own. However, her house happens to be on an eminence excellently suited for defensive operations. I should post my guns in its grounds just the same if it were the Executive Mansion in Washington. If your personal feelings are so strong, I can send your company without you, or I can assign another command to that part of the line."

The Vagabond preferred this alternative in his heart; but he knew that his men were only vagabonds, while some of the regiments on his own as well as on the enemy's side, as is ever the case, were vandals. If he went he could do as little with rifle-fire, which is indiscriminate in its choice of victims, and as much with the bayonet, which discerns its enemy, as stern necessity would permit.

"I'll go, sir," he said.

"And you'll take the house at any cost?"

"At any cost, sir." He repeated the words "at any cost," meaning any cost to himself.

"Refine it by all the processes you will, war is brutal," the General added; "and the only way to minimize its brutality is to make it impersonal and impartial. Advance with your command at once!"

XXIV

A TARGET FOR HER SAKE

For the hastening of Mr. Lanley's end, clearly in sight of his physician, the war was responsible. He rode less, rose later, and sat up far into the night, his sherry decanter at his elbow.

When the tramp of the Vagabonds partially awakened him, he dozed off again in the conviction that young Southbridge was up at cock-crow sweeping over the face of the land. When the Virginia Firsts thundered through the yard he was wide awake. By the time they returned, he had risen. Feebly stepping to the window and pulling aside the curtain, their yell in answer to Volilla's call for a cheer for their commander assaulted his ears.

"In God's name, can't I get any peace!" he growled. But his mood quickly changed. "Look at them, the young Tigers! Thank Heaven there is still someone left in the old State worthy of the days of Light Horse Harry Lee!"

He thought of dressing and going out to pay his compliments. A twinge of gout sent him back to bed and finally he fell asleep. Formerly, he had tolerated Southbridge, whose manners were not his; now he was fond of him. Their agreement was vehement on the one great question of the hour. Their plan of campaign, as simple as Tim Booker's, in-

THE VAGABOND

volved nothing less than the immediate occupation of Washington. The very sight of the outpost placed in front of his premises as a sop to his complaints had sent Mr. Lanley into a fit of rage. Daily he had anathematized it from the windows with warnings not to risk its precious life by advancing a step.

His granddaughter had no relief from that solicitude which saved him from his own acerbity except her morning rides, stolen while he slept. Before she departed with Mrs. Bulwer for the Confederate lines she had listened again at his door and heard only the sound of his deep breathing. When slumber did overtake him, his age and exhaustion made him yield completely. Not until the Vagabond was back in the Union lines did he finally ring for Marcus Aurelius to bring his boots. With Volilla to pour his coffee as usual, he sat down to breakfast, ignorant of the events of the morning. When he was sipping the last half of his second cup, by easy approaches she broached the news which she knew he must learn sooner or later. Alas! her artfulness was in vain. He sprang to his feet, overturning his chair and making the dishes on the table rattle.

"Yankee cavalry! Yankee cavalry has been in these grounds!" he gasped.

"And a Yankee took Missy's hoss and made a map frum de cup'la. Yis, sah!"

Having had his climax, Marcus ran from the room in terror.

"And I slept! And you did not tell me!" Mr. Lanley cried.

His face was white; his figure had straightened to an attitude of youth, and his eyes were flaming. No

THE VAGABOND

protest about the physician's warning could stay him: for the first time in months he mounted the stairs without a hand on the railing and kept on with firm step to the cupola itself. There he saw the thin line of the Confederates like a dotted tracing on a map, and beyond it the Federals spreading out from columns into skirmish order, in the manner of so many fans, slowly opening until they were quite extended and their edges joined. Himself a soldier in his youth, he understood the meaning of this, and putting aside the boastings of wine-heated conversation he realized the all-supreme relative value of numbers.

"Tell your commander that we can't stand against that any more than you can dam a river with a fish-net!" he called to the signal-man, "and tell him I said so—I said so, Mortimer Lanley, the owner of Lanleyton!"

Letter by letter the message was sent, and letter by letter came the laconic, unsentimental, war-time answer:

"The General considers the situation satisfactory."

So it was. The Confederate commander had depleted not reinforced the guns and men sent out to trap a company of cavalry. When his scouts ascertained that an attack was to be made in force, he had no desire other than to make the hill seem valuable to the Federals; to hold as many of them as he could there, while the troops that occupied the camp near Lanleyton were engaged in the battle of the morrow.

And now Mr. Lanley became strangely cool and savagely so. First, he had Marcus bring his sporting-rifle; then a glass and a bottle of his oldest, his '32 port. He enjoyed the bouquet with a connois-

THE VAGABOND

seur's nice deliberation and drank a glass with a steadier hand than he had known for ten years.

"Marcus," he said, evenly, "take your post in the cellar! When my countrymen desert their land and their honor, throw out the bottles, the oldest first. No shirt-sleeves Yankee shall taste my wine!"

"T'row—t'row-ow it out, Massa!"

"Yes, and don't stand there gaping!"

Marcus departed. What purpose was there in his objections when the mistress's had failed? To all that she said as she stood at Mr. Lanley's side he was as oblivious as if she did not exist, until, finally, he turned to her and said:

"Mean? What do I mean, Volilla? I mean that there is one Virginian who is going to fight! I won't leave the land my fathers fought for. I'll have a life or two in return for mine. Oh, I know you, you shirt-sleeves! You have ever made the errors of others your tearful story; your nose is too close to your porridge to see your own. You drove Roger Williams out of Connecticut; you persecuted the Quakers; you lied with pious faces in praying tones to the Indians; you burned poor, helpless women as witches! So you're fit to rule us and reform us! Fit to invade Virginia, which gave you your freedom after your slinking, thieving quartermasters were ready to go on their knees to the enemy and your Congressmen polluted the air of Philadelphia with slanders of Washington! Who wrote the Declaration of Independence? Who wrote the Constitution? Slaveholders! Who wanted to secede in 1812 in the face of a foreign enemy? You shirt-sleeved robbers, I'll have one shot at you!"

THE VAGABOND

Again begging him to go below, Volilla put her hand on his arm coaxingly, a method that she had tried in vain that day for the first time. A puff of smoke rose from the trees where Bulwer's guns were posted, a booming report broke the summer stillness, and a shell bursting near the Federal line made it bend a little as if it were a long tape caught by a sudden gust of wind; then it straightened and seemed to grow taut as if it was prepared for a hurricane. With precision and automatic regularity Bulwer's iron pets kept on pounding. He was as happy as a boy in a ball-game and as cool and rigid as an icicle. He watched the result of every shell, passed a word after it to the gunners, and counted the blue pins which tumbled. The Confederate infantry fired and fell back, fired and fell back, in the good order of a feint mixed with the individual resentment of a few who lagged behind the others and took careful aim in expression of their contempt and as much as to say that they were going only because they were told to, not at all because they had to. When they left Bulwer without support and the Federals were getting dangerously near, he brought off his battery at the gallop, having done his work so skilfully that it seemed no more than a playful manœuvre.

Mr. Lanley drained his bottle and, kneeling with rifle on the railing of the platform, waited until he was sure that the enemy was in range. As they hastened forward, the Federals were delivering themselves of a scattering fire, all save a small section immediately in front of the house. A close view would have shown this to be composed of dismounted cavalry. It was conspicuous for another reason, one

THE VAGABOND

which its silent rifles permitted; one which had awakened in Bulwer, whose undisturbed gaze missed nothing, admiration and amazement, and in General Husted (riding up and down in the rear of his command) admiration and condemnation for its foolhardiness. The Vagabond was several yards in advance of his men, insuring the silence of their rifles with his own flesh as a barrier of protection to the Lanley house.

"You are mine!" Mr. Lanley said, softly. "I'm as sure of you as if you were a deer on a hillock."

With hand abnormally steady and eye abnormally clear, he took careful aim. The ball kicked up the dust at its object's feet.

"I didn't allow enough for my elevation," he said, as he fired again.

There was no evidence of where the bullet had struck. The Vagabond still came on with the limitations of his speed and the seeming certainty of fate.

"Over!" said the marksman. "The third will do it; just between the other two."

This kicked up the dust beyond and a little to the right of the Vagabond.

"The wind!" Mr. Lanley snapped out the word savagely. "I'll allow for that this time, too."

All the while the target was getting nearer. You could see the flash of his belt-clasp in the sun, now. Mr. Lanley smiled as mercilessly as the steel barrel whose sight lay on the figure that sprang up on a little hillock; and in the second that he was a blue silhouette against the sky, the bullet was sped toward the victim, who threw up his hands, whirled half round with the impact, and fell.

THE VAGABOND

His comrades abruptly halted, as if with his the heart of the charge stopped beating also, and their fallen leader was obscured in a group no sooner formed than it spread into line again under the fierce direction of oath-roaring Tim and sharp-worded Jimmy. It sprang ahead, leaving a blue spot on the sward and began firing with a revengeful will. Vo-lilla heard the bullets thripping through the branches of the trees with the peculiar sound that an old soldier would recognize instantly in the quietest garden cloister. Mr. Lanley heard nothing. Voicing his triumph with a cry that there was one invader less, he had reloaded his rifle and was about to take aim when he saw the stricken man rise and, staggering a little, in the manner of one who has been stunned, soon find his feet and, catching up with his men, stop their firing and once more take his place at their head.

Mr. Lanley dropped his rifle as if he had seen an apparition. All his careful shooting had gone for naught. His coolness and deliberation passed into insane rage. He made his way down the stairs in a fever of haste, stumbling many times but not falling, and crying as he went:

“This comes of the great State of Virginia putting herself in the hands of Beauregard—of a little Frenchman from New Orleans!”

At the door he heard the triumphant cries of the Vagabonds, who ran with their bayonets as stiffly held as the quills of a porcupine. The Confederates were no longer feigning; they were falling back in deadly earnest. Mr. Lanley's last spasmodic effort in life was to try to rally them:

THE VAGABOND

"Are you men or are you pickaninnies?" he shouted. "Stand! stand, and they'll stop! they'll stop!"

If the runners heard, with the roar of musketry in their ears and bullets from other parts of the Federal line whistling near, they did not heed. Mr. Lanley plunged headlong upon the gravel of the drive on the very spot where from boyhood he had mounted his horse to ride forth and survey his domain.

Volilla, who had followed, saw the blood trickling from a wound in his side. She leaned over him and put her handkerchief to the spot. The handkerchief grew red as quickly as a sponge saps up water.

"It wasn't one of our shots."

She looked up on hearing these words spoken in a voice of great relief to the speaker's self as much as to her. The Vagabond was standing beside her, a trickling red streak on his cheek; his men were rushing by in the tumult of chase. She made no reply. He bent down, putting his own handkerchief over hers helplessly. Mr. Lanley opened his lips feebly.

"There was a French nobleman in the Revolution who when he saw the inevitable was—he invited his peasants to a banquet—and blew chateau and all to kingdom come. I—I had no gunpowder. Trust—trust yourself to Southbridge! Thank God, there's still one of—the—old—school——"

There his words died in his throat. A medical officer who came hastening at the sight of a casualty knelt and found that his skill was powerless. Shock had killed Mr. Lanley before loss of blood could.

"I knew it," Volilla said, slowly, as she rose to her feet.

THE VAGABOND

She looked around for a servant, not wishing, such was her grief and anger, to ask the least favor from the invader. The Vagabond understood. He and three of his men lifted the body gently. With her leading, they carried him upstairs to his own room, where they laid him on the bed. The men tiptoed out in silence and awe, leaving the two alone with the dead. He felt himself held by a desire for forgiveness for the part he had played in this tragedy, yet knowing that no words to express it would be forthcoming. As he looked at the face below him, with the high nose, its cartilage showing white, the mouth set in a proud curve, the silvery hair in disorder, he thought of his own father and recognized in the two something in common. He closed the eyes, crossed the withered hands, and tried to straighten out the coat, with a sense of gratitude for some occupation, while he still groped for an expression of his overwhelming sympathy and regret. When he raised his head, Miss Lanley was standing still in the middle of the room, and in the agony of her face he saw plainly enough that she waited on his departure.

"He was a brave old man," he said, slowly, as if trying to make the words convey all he felt.

"I need no Yankee to tell me that," she replied. "He was my grandfather. I have neither father nor mother nor brother nor sister." He bowed his head. "All I ask is this room," she continued. "The rest is—yours."

"I—I understand," he said; and with that he left her, still dry-eyed, to her grief.

Not an order but awe held his men's curiosity in leash. None except those who bore the body had

THE VAGABOND

entered the house. The Vagabond, having this fear in mind, made a search. In the dining-room he found Aikens, who had long looked forward to the day when, hanging onto a column of soldiers, he should see his old employer humiliated. The green face took on a deeper shade as he was made to empty his pockets of silver; then, in the impatience of disgust, his captor seized him by the coat-collar and in the presence of grinning soldiers pump-handled him out of the house, bidding him go to the rear on pain of something worse. And Aikens was one who never forgot.

As the flying skirt of a linen duster disappeared under the trees, his troopers gathered around their Captain with comments droll and congratulatory. When the doctor called for water to dress his wound, all started on the errand. When the blood was washed away, only the track of bare skull left by a glancing ball remained.

"What your little lieutenant wants to know," said Tim Booker, "is whether you wasn't killed because you nodded in the nick of time or because you didn't."

"Dodged it, of course. If ever you see one coming, you do the same or you'll be sorry, Timothy."

He held the privacy of the old house as sacred as that of any emperor's closet. There was no need of turning it into a fort when there was no enemy in sight. Through the rest of the morning and the afternoon no one passed the guards and no sound came from the interior, save the occasional foot-fall of a servant. For him the minutes were hours. His realization of her agony was only less horrible than the

THE VAGABOND

conviction that he could do nothing to ease it. When she startled him by appearing in the door-way, he was pacing up and down under the trees. She did not seem to be speaking to him, but to someone miles away, as she asked for permission to bury her grandfather.

The soldiers dug the grave. Beyond that, she refused all assistance, even a military salute, which the Vagabond offered. At some other time, when there were friends present, there should be a ceremony, she told herself. Wrapped in a Confederate flag of her making, the body was borne by the servants and lowered to its resting-place, while the Vagabonds, officers and men, stood in a circle at some distance, silent, with heads bared. As she turned away, her face, because her eyes were still dry, was the more expressive of the depth of her proud and controlled misery.

She came direct to where the Vagabond was standing and asked if she might be conducted to the Confederate lines. He assented, without thought that she might carry information to the enemy. Her own horse, his accoutrements intact and still watched by the orderly, was brought to the door. She started at sight of her beloved Folly; gave his neck a fond stroke; said, "Thank you for bringing him," without looking up; refused the Union hand that was offered, and called for Marcus to assist her to mount. The Vagabond himself, under a white flag, rode beside her toward the valley. For some time they proceeded in silence, which she at last broke.

"I must tell you—it's right I should," she said. "I am going because I know my grandfather would

THE VAGABOND.

wish it. I think our brave fellows might desist from attacking on my account. I do not wish to be in the way of their duty. They must know that they may burn the house and raze the very trees to the ground if it will enable them to win a victory."

This explained why she had hastened her grandfather's burial. It showed the quality of the woman and, measurably, the quality of her race; it told the Vagabond again how wisely he had chosen.

"I am glad you are going, if you wish to go," he said.

A solitary horseman came riding rapidly out to meet them, as if he feared that the white flag might get near enough to the camp to discern that only a rear-guard of cavalry now defended it. The Vagabond drew rein and awaited him. The two saluted stiffly.

"This lady wishes to enter the Confederate lines," the Vagabond said.

"Very well," was Southbridge's reply.

Southbridge saluted—stiffly. The Vagabond saluted—stiffly. Volilla rode to Southbridge's side and impulsively put her hand on his arm. She was among friends again, and it looked as if her sorrow would find an outlet in tears and her head would go upon the shoulder of the one to whose care her grandfather's dying words had intrusted her. But her figure straightened and she recovered her reserve.

"Oh, I'd like to have ridden through and through you! My General kept me back here," Southbridge called, in his bitter wrath. "I shall cross sabres with you yet!"

"I long for the pleasure," said the Vagabond.

They saluted again and faced about.

XXV

FATHER BOB ILLUSTRATES

While Volilla was sobbing in the arms of Mrs. Bulwer, the Vagabonds, under orders which awaited their Captain on his return, were leaving Lanleyton to the care of a regiment of infantry. Shortly before dusk they found General Husted on another road, the direct road from Washington to the battle-field of Bull Run. He sat on a fence-rail watching the passage of troops, who promised themselves that after the fight of the morrow they could meander on to Richmond and end the "rebellion." The Vagabond, who had wondered, as his company rode single file at one side of the marching column, why everyone looked at him so sharply, realized the cause when the General mentioned the bandage that encircled his head. Twenty-four hours later a wounded man was not a curiosity; and he was not to be for four years to come.

"Fresh and ready for work, eh?" said the General. "Well, I have it for you. I want you to join me as aide to-morrow."

After training his men for months against the day when they should gallop across a plain plying their sabres, he was to be made an errand-boy! Such was his view, at least.

"I'd rather—rather fight, sir."

THE VAGABOND

"Oh, you'll have a whiff of powder, don't you worry—more than you'll have back there guarding trains; for that will be the lot of the horsemen tomorrow."

"What!"

The word came in a piercing, nasal shriek from Tim Booker, who nearly fell on his horse's mane in disappointment. It was a most unmilitary interruption, which six months before in the regulars would have brought trouble to the speaker from that same General who now received it good-humoredly.

"You wait, my son. There's going to be enough bruises in this war to accommodate everybody"—and the General cut short his sentence for fear that the men should hear the opinion of an officer who knew his enemy. "You wait," he added.

"I'm waiting and growing gray, and mebbe when I'm too old to put a foot in a stirrup I'll get a chance to draw my sabre," Tim remarked, in an undertone; while to Jimmy Pool he grumbled on: "That king of France who marched his men up a hill and down again wasn't such a d——n fool after all. He learned something by experience. History don't record that he marched 'em up and down three or four times, like we've been doing!"

At the General's dictation Lieutenant Maxim wrote out Acting Captain Jimmy Pool's orders for the morrow. Then the staff mounted. As it rode forward, the Vagabond turned and waved his hand in farewell to his men and they replied with swinging caps and a hurrah.

Ahead of them and behind them was the dusty blue column winding with the road, and in their ears

THE VAGABOND

the clink of canteens and the plunk of feet in the hot dust. Dust, dust, dust! The very cloud of it overhead hung in the still air as if in suspense over the issue of the morrow. Here was a good regiment and there a bad one, thanks to the popularity of militia service in the section from which it was drawn, to locality itself and to the character of its officers. One in particular instantly held attention as it approached because its caps were red and not of the regulation pattern. It marched slouchily, grudgingly, as a truant going to school under personal conduct. Its time had expired that night and it had a mind to turn in its tracks and go home, not out of cowardice but out of homesickness, cussedness, and belief that it had been ill treated. The most erect one of the lot marched in the rear, keeping stragglers in line. To these men, whom he had drilled without prejudice, he was known as "Granddad," "Drill-'em Granddad." Looking at his back, only the rim of white hair under his cap revealed his age. The General and his new aide recognized him at the same instant.

"Captain Herrick!" exclaimed the General. "I know of one regiment that will do its duty to-morrow."

"And it please God, yes, sir."

The voice was firm enough, though the hand that he raised to his cap trembled with the physical strain that his will made his flesh bear.

"A man of your years ought not to be on foot," said the General, indignantly. "Haven't you a horse?"

"Yes, sir. Only I'm just demonstrating to my men that twenty miles's no march at all."

THE VAGABOND

"For that matter, Captain, you're not supposed to be out here, anyway. You have done your share in by-gone days. You are supposed to drill these men, not to fight them. Your assignment is purely auxiliary. But I understand. You may be worth a regiment to-morrow, and I am too selfish to send you back."

"Yes, sir. I hope to steady 'em a leetle."

The Vagabond had dismounted, and while the General spoke he seemed as much a stranger to Father Bob as the rest of the staff. He saw that the Captain had grown older, thinner, whiter, in the week since they had met. When the General passed on, he put his arms around the old man.

"Don't go! Don't go! I'll do enough fighting for the family," he pleaded.

"I owe it to my God and my country to see this regiment through its baptism. Come, son, we mustn't wait. You must catch up with the General, and I with my boys."

Their last words to each other were warnings to be careful. They did not meet again until the next day when the battle had been in progress for some time.

Through the smoke, to guns that flashed fire in the blue darkness, to lines that sagged and to lines that were advancing with shouts, and back again to his General, the Vagabond had been kept on the gallop. Occasionally passing out of the theatre of action he had a glimpse of the road swollen with the tide of human beings. Congressmen had come to give the boys from their districts the cheer of their presence; officials had brought their wives. Every available carriage in Washington was mixed with the supply

THE VAGABOND

wagons, while the slightly wounded and the explanatory sick bore news in exchange for sympathy. It was a crowd waiting for the army to open the gates—a simple matter—so it could see the spectacle of Richmond once more in loyal hands. With the rumor of success creeping and dodging back from the roaring and rattling clouds in front, it pressed forward with individual desire for good seats. Then, out of the clouds, came men and guns, flying with no purpose except flight, and the onlookers in front were caught between two forces, just as when the police clear the way for a parade.

At this juncture, General Husted, seeming a part of his horse and his horse seeming a part of the earth beneath its feet, surveyed the field and grasped the situation. Upon his brigade, his green brigade, depended the line of communication. He turned his attention to the two regiments on his left. On the right he had Captain Herrick and the Red Caps, and he sent the Vagabond to tell the Captain to hold out at any cost until reinforcements should be brought up. The Red Caps were on a ridge which bent slightly toward the road, but not presenting any range for a cross-fire. Bare-headed, under the terrific sun of that famous July day, Captain Herrick was walking up and down, exposing his whole person; and he was talking in the same manner that he walked—jauntily, with the oblivious air of optimism of a man smoking a cigar after a good dinner. He had neither sword nor revolver; his weapon was the men hugging the ground at his feet, which he handled with a fencing-master's skill.

“Shooting clean over us! Pipped a few, that’s

THE VAGABOND

true; one out of fifty, mebbe. That isn't war! That's Fourth of July! Take your time; shoot low. Pretty soon they're going to charge. They'll look big and they'll yell hard, but they'll be just our marks; yes, sir, just our apple-pie! You've only got to lie steady and you'll lie here all day—travelling's hard work in such a hot sun, anyway—and in the evening we'll go out and help bury those buckies. Hello! That officer went down! One of our dandy Jims sent his horse out to graze. Looks like a good horse, too. Guess I know a man that won't have to walk to-morrow."

A big hoarse-voiced private sprang up and seized hold of the Captain hysterically.

"By G—!" he cried. "I'm not going to see you shot all to pieces. You've got to get down-n-n!"

The words were scarcely spoken when a bullet passed through his head, leaving him to fall as the woodsman's axe leaves the tree.

"There!" said Father Bob, "didn't I tell you so, boys? Let the fellows over there get up and we'll fix 'em quick enough—if we *just lie close and shoot straight.*"

One charge had been repelled, and the Confederates were preparing for a second, to which they proposed to bring more men and an extended line. Under cover, on the very flank of the Red Caps, the Vagabond could see the gleaming bayonets in wait for the word which, in their sure estimate, was to finish the business. A gust of wind driving the smoke away, their leader saw the guidon of his own troop fluttering not a thousand yards away. He put his lips to Captain Herrick's ear.

THE VAGABOND

"For God's sake, yes!" was the whispered reply. "They're bound to crumple up like paper. I'm only trying to keep 'em steady so I can bring 'em to that hill back there in order. No, no! Don't! It's suicide. It's only a drop of water on the flames."

The Vagabond did not wait for him to finish the sentence. He was all aglow with a clear, definite object. No general would have undertaken to order him where he was about to go, into the very jaws of death, with every tooth a point of fire. The conception was worthy of the boy who wanted to climb a mountain and find a mine; of a vagabond and a dreamer, confidently falling in love with a Confederate girl.

XXVI

BULLETS HAVE NO SENTIMENT

With the battle roaring in front of them—poor, starving wretches outside the banquet-room window—the Vagabonds, chafing in their inaction, their sweat turning dust into grime, had kept their place on the line of communication. Every man of them was a physical apotheosis of dust and enforced idleness. Jimmy Pool had been heard to make one remark besides orders that morning. This he repeated several times. He seemed to unroll the word which began with H from a spool of gall.

Among those who had carriages was Miss Felicia Hope, of the Sanitary Commission, perched on a cargo of delicacies and bandages. She turned red at the sight of a trooper who was squatted on the ground with his reins over his forearm.

“Good-morning, Judge!” she called.

He lifted his cap, and after a swift look of recognition and surprise settled back to the exclusiveness of the ranks.

“Good-morning, ma’am,” he remarked, pleasantly.

For the first time when they met, Miss Felicia and not the Judge was flustered.

“How thin you’ve grown!” she exclaimed.

“Yes, ma’am. Thirty pounds. That was my oratorical part; entirely superfluous. Ask the horse!” came the short sentences of the one-time rhetorician.

THE VAGABOND

"Are you quite well?"

"Perfectly. Ride thirty miles and feel nothing except an appetite."

She could not help seeing that he was handsomer from the change; and there he sat, immovable, tantalizing, inconsiderate.

"I have some cake. Perhaps you would like a piece," she ventured.

"No, thank you, ma'am. Not used to luxuries! Don't like 'em now!"

He took his stubby clay pipe and filled it and, having fished out a dirty match from his pocket, lighted the tobacco and blew a huge puff of smoke with most earthly satisfaction.

"Have you taken to smoking a clay pipe?" she asked, in surprise.

"Yes, ma'am. This one's just ripe. I sleep with it under my saddle every night for fear the other fellows'll hook it."

"O-oh!" she gasped. "Where is the Vagabond? I don't see him."

"The Vagabond, ma'am?"

"You know who I mean. Captain Williams!" she replied, gingerly.

"He's not with the command, ma'am. Privates are not supposed to ask where their officers go."

"My! How you have changed!" she cried, in a temper.

"Yes, ma'am."

"I suppose you're sorry enough now that you enlisted?"

"No, ma'am. I like this kind of life when the boys don't hook my pipe. I'm very fond of that,

THE VAGABOND

ma'am. I let Hosea Pillsbury, my bunkie, smoke it in return for helping watch it. Hosea's quit drinking entirely. Says he never would have drunk at all if he'd known there was a pipe in the world like this."

She pressed her lips lest she should say something for which she would be sorry.

"Lieutenant Pool is commanding, then?" she managed to say.

"Yes, ma'am." He nodded toward Jimmy and touched his hat disinterestedly.

Jimmy, it has already been observed, was not in a jovial humor. When she asked where was the best place for the distribution of her delicacies, he replied:

"Washington, ma'am."

"Brute!" she said, and bade her driver proceed.

"No, ma'am. I can't let one of your sex go any farther," Jimmy said.

The sight of a fellow with his handkerchief around his fingers straggling to the rear with faint account of a great victory led her to accept the inevitable. Though he had had only the skin braised, he got a huge piece of sponge-cake and a bottle of ginger-ale, the while he told how the rebels ran and he avoided the searching gray eyes of Jimmy Pool.

Thus, all Miss Felicia's delicacies went to the fast-travelling, over-happy ones—heroes she called them—who had a scratch on the extremities, not always made by a bullet, either. She had none left for the fellows with real wounds and the comatose burdens of litters which came still later. The panorama before her swiftly picturing sinister truths, she began to realize the horror of righting wrongs with the sword, which knows only skill and power. Furtively,

THE VAGABOND

the Judge watched her every movement as, nervous, trembling, and yet cool, she flew from one victim to another, praying, whispering peace, and doing all that a woman could to assist a surgeon on the battle-field. She fairly hated Jimmy Pool (languidly sitting on a stump). Had he not warned her to keep her good-ies for a better cause? And weren't there dying men of high courage crying for water, with emptied soda and ginger-ale bottles lying about, while the skulkers who had drunk their fill were meandering on out of danger's reach expectorating tobacco-juice by the way?

Meanwhile, Jimmy had been as practical as ever. He had her carriage turned about facing Washington. When he saw the road at the edge of the wall of smoke swelling like a bladder, he understood what that meant and approached Miss Felicia.

"I advise you to go, ma'am," he said. "We're being driven back."

"Driven back!" she exclaimed. Her righteous cause being driven back! Driven back, when they were to have been in Richmond in a week!

"Yes, ma'am. Somebody has to be. The Confederates have more men, or they are doing better work than we are to-day. War's a great science and war's also hell, I'm sorry to say." Jimmy did not mean to be rude. He was thick with disgust, which influenced his well-intentioned explanation.

"I won't!" Miss Felicia cried, and went on taking the death-bed message of a fine, blue-eyed Massachusetts boy who thought that he was dying, but who was to live to fight in other battles.

"Then we'll wait a moment, ma'am," Jimmy re-

THE VAGABOND

marked, respectfully, judging the while by the approach of the inflated part of the road.

Directly, something passed over their heads with a whish and buried itself in the ground beyond them. The next one broke and killed—actually killed—a skulker. Jimmy stepped over to the Judge and spoke a matter-of-fact word or two. The Judge ran to Miss Felicia, who had looked up on hearing the crack of the bursting shell and then gone on easing the position of a man on a stretcher. At that moment she was divinely feminine in her courage. If he realized this he did not say so. He merely observed:

“It’s time, ma’am.”

“I won’t!” she cried back.

“Then I’ll carry you!”

He advanced a step; she saw that he would be as good as his word.

“You sha’n’t!” she cried, and ran to her carriage.

The instant she was seated, the driver put the whip to the horses.

On his part, the Judge heard the call to mount. In their rigid formation four deep, the Vagabonds were the only stable living thing on the road. The sight of them sitting their horses so steadily was cooling to fevered brains that pictured the world in chaos. Jimmy Pool was in the act of spinning out the little word beginning with H, when he saw his leader flying toward them, and his face suddenly lighted with glorious joy. He understood the meaning of the madly waved cap before he could hear the Vagabond’s voice. The men understood, too. With common impulse, they wheeled into line.

XXVII

AT LAST A CHARGE

A charge! A charge! Cavalry-men live in thought of it and die unsatisfied, thinking of what they would have done if they had had the opportunity. When it comes it is like having one great draught of champagne in a lifetime, so quickly is it over, so thrilling is it. The mimic thing of the parade-ground is a meal off plates without food.

The Vagabonds had spread out until the sabre-tip of one rider could not reach that of another. The horses themselves had caught the fever of expectation and their nostrils dilated as the imaginations of their riders soared. From the distance came the yell that said that the Confederates had sprung from cover to the assault. Their footsteps were ticking off the time until they should hold the Red Caps prisoners or, gasping for breath from their run, gloatingly make the backs of the Red Caps targets.

All the Vagabonds' hearts rose gleefully to the occasion save one; all had no sense of fear, no thought of the result, save one, and that was you, you big, hulking, bewhiskered miner, Tim Booker! He could feel his legs knocking nervously against his horse's sides; to steady his hands he seized the pommel. He laughed hysterically; the tears ran down his cheeks, and his voice, rising to a high tremolo, broke.

"Oh, God Almighty! Why did I ever leave the

THE VAGABOND

peace of the eternal hills of California!" he called. "We'll all be butchered, killed, and slaughtered! There's eleven million rebels waiting to swallow us alive!"

Thus he bawled his fears till, reaching the rising ground, they saw the hurrying gray figures in a long line before them, running with the precipitation of men hastening from a mine about to explode. Haste meant safety to them; haste to reach the enemy's position. A bullet whistling near Tim's ear suddenly changed the face of the world for him. His legs stiffened in the stirrups; he felt the strength of Hercules in his arm.

"Slash 'em! Mince 'em! Chop 'em! Eat 'em up!" he yelled. "We're cannibals, savage cannibals! Eat 'em up! Eat 'em up!"

To the General, now hastening toward the right with reinforcements of reformed men struggling somewhere behind him, that charge seemed nothing more nor less than jumping off the earth with the chance of alighting safely on a star.

"They'll simply be gobbled up, that's all," he thought, "and thank God for a desperate stroke of genius that will give us a little breathing-space." Then he bade the last member of his staff with him to go back and help the others to curse and pray with and wheedle the reinforcements—anything to get them up.

Not facing but at right angles to it, the Vagabonds were precipitated from the rising ground against the Confederate infantry. The position was much the same as if a line of mounted police descended upon scattered people all intent upon crossing the street;

THE VAGABOND

only these people were determined men with rifles and bayonets. The charge came upon them with the shock and surprise of a wire stretched across the path of a pedestrian at night. They turned with the rage of one suddenly balked of his prize. In that instant, when the Red Caps had ceased to fire and had risen to cheer the appearance of deliverance unexpected, the Confederates heard the tumult of hoofs intermingled with the booming of field guns and saw foaming nostrils over their heads. Each man became an absolute unit again, dodging, shooting, or thrusting, while the Vagabonds, as they rode, looked down on faces all forgetful of corps in that vital second, all murderously keen upon self-preservation. Steel blades whistled through the air, sometimes encountering steel, sometimes finding flesh, and again rising to another blow without resistance. Horses stumbled and fell, throwing their riders overhead into the arms of an enemy, the host being as surprised as the guest. Horses with empty saddles rode on in the mad companionship of havoc that knows no morrows, that cares for nothing except the thrilling present.

Jimmy Pool was smiling, and he alone had not joined his voice to the chorus of yells. The Vagabond was at once cool and burning with excitement; at once clear-eyed to every detail and drunk with the eagerness of conflict, and withal as insensible of danger as the rising partridge to the meaning of the sportsman's gun. Tim Booker thought that he was fighting the whole Confederate army single-handed, and every man he thrust at he counted as dead. The Vagabond leading, thanks to Breaker, kept calling, while he plied his sabre, "Don't stop! Don't fear!

THE VAGABOND

Follow me! Follow me!" while nobody could hear him above that torrent of noise. The horses by instinct followed their leader, the great bay, whose life carried the hopes of all. Behind them they left a swath of huddled infantry-men on all fours, rising gamely to their feet, trying to reload and fire—at something.

At the bend in the Confederate line, where the flanking party met the front division of it, they passed through inevitably and the horses came to a stop at the whistle's call, their riders holding aloft reeking blades. They were within the enemy's forces. They were a stream that had been ingulfed, and their dusty blue uniforms on a background of dusty trees, dusty sward, and dusty, gray-coated soldiery showed their origin. In front of them was the Confederate reserve; in the rear, the firing-line that they had just passed. A year later, the same personnel of the enemy would have taken that little band of cavalry prisoners with the same easy confidence that a farmer puts up the bars of the barn-yard for the night. They would have fired at the riders with sharp-shooters' accuracy and a veteran's ready initiative, then run forward to gather them in. As it was, they were as surprised as you would be to find a total stranger materialize out of thin air and reach for your under-shirt at the same time that you did in the morning. They looked and blinked. Those who lifted their rifles feared that they would shoot their own men beyond. Officers who, a year later, would have known just what to do, shouted differing commands in view of this totally unexpected first encounter with the Yankees.

THE VAGABOND

"What in hell's going to become of us now?" gasped one of the Vagabonds.

"We're going back!" yelled Tim Booker. "We're going to eat 'em up! We're cannibals, savage cannibals! We'll cut the rebel army into slices like it was a big, soft cheese!"

In the short time that it took the enemy to recover its poise and to realize how hopelessly this little band of cavalry was at its mercy, the Vagabonds had faced about and started on the return, and not a second too soon. If not with the order which makes the steel at the horse's breast invincible, at least in the proper individual positions, the Confederates, recovering their breath, their animus, their corps spirit, and their acumen, along the route which the charge had taken and by which it must return presented their bayonets in rigid and murderous welcome, confident that the Red Caps, who paralleled them, would not fire on their own troops. The run out had been a surprise; the run back was a set event, the Confederate firing-line knowing its part.

"They're coming back! They're coming back!" the General shouted, with the enthusiasm of a sportsman who sees his horse winning; only no race could compare with this one of life and death. He gave up his glasses and fell back on his naked eye, as we all do in great excitement. "That's it! that's it! That's military genius!" he suddenly cried.

No horses would charge upon bayonets and no cavalry would attempt it. The valiant company must return either in the zone between the Confederate reserve and firing-line or else between the firing-line and the Red Caps. A warning song of a shell made

THE VAGABOND

the Vagabond choose the former. Bulwer, who had been purring over the prospect with his guns all shotted ready to converge at right angles on the Vagabonds, lost his academical calm so far as to swear in an oath that was the more savage because he used one so seldom. His missiles would be as dangerous to his friends as to the enemy.

Then, that Confederate firing-line also had a flash of genius, man for man, which, we flatter ourselves, is American. It realized that the cavalry in its rear could do it no more harm than a passing drove of wild horses to a man in a tree. It started its bayonets with all speed to take the hill where lay the Red Caps. But the Red Caps were made soldiers now. They grinned in awful satisfaction and hurled the attackers back as easily as you can make a man drop his hold of a plank by rapping his fingers.

Still under the fire of the infantry of the Confederate reserve, the surviving troopers returned over the rising ground which had flung them into the conflict as an actor rushes from the flies—all save Tim Booker. Circumstances over which he was proud master made him a little late. He came into that harbor of refuge with a small Confederate private, his shirt clutched in Tim's sabre-hand, bobbing most uncomfortably on the horn of the saddle.

"I killed a hundred!" he yelled, in a thundering voice—a bass voice, now. "And I just lifted this little tobacco-raiser by the hair of the head and brought him as a sample to show you what you got so scared about!"

"Oh, make it fifty, Timothy," said Jimmy.

"One hundred and six, to be exact," Tim replied.

THE VAGABOND

"I cut down the actual figures to please you. Now I stick to 'em."

The General, his delight over the troop's exploit muffled in the demands of the moment, gave an order instead of a compliment. In company of the reinforcements which had arrived, he sent the Vagabonds dismounted back to extend the line of the Red Caps and, therefore, make their tactical position complete. At the bugle's call Tim was in a quandary; he did not want to lose his captive. Finally, he handed him over to one of the horse-holders:

"Let Willie play some if he wants to. Must miss his ma," he said.

"You —— ——— great big piece of whiskers and suet!" cried the little Confederate, in rage and tears. "I could lick you till you bawled if I had half a chance."

"Willie," admonished Tim, "when a man's been snatched up by the hair of his head the way you was, he don't want to talk. He wants to stop and consider and grow!"

Hurrying on to catch up with his comrades, Tim saw how their numbers had dwindled, and a light burst upon him.

"They've been killing our fellows!" he cried, his voice rising to the tremolo. "The blasted tobacco-raisers! Just let me get a shot at 'em! Oh, I'm a cannibal, a savage cannibal!"

Then not only he, not only Billy, but every other Vagabond, coming to their new position (as infantry) on the crest of the ridge, before them the field of their charge scattered with fallen men and fallen horses, saw one man carrying another in his arms toward

THE VAGABOND

them. A dozen volunteers starting to their assistance were stopped by their Captain.

"See!" he exclaimed. "The Confederates are ceasing to fire in that direction. If you go out they will begin again."

It was one of those moments when the sheer chivalry inherent in every brave man's soul lifts him above the motives which bring him to a battle-field. Though the blood-lust of strife was in their hearts, though the glassy eyes of their own dead around them called for revenge, the Confederates, as they turned their rifles away, cheered the gallantry which had made enemies akin. Through a zone of gentle peace, Hosea Pillsbury, one-time town drunkard, himself bleeding, bore the one-time Judge, helpless as an infant, with the blood gushing from a wound in his side.

"I was so glad I fell near you and I could help!" he said; and seeing his bunkie under the doctor's care, he lost no time in that critical moment in taking his place in the line to which the Confederate musketry—such are the amenities of war—now seemed to say:

"We let that brave fellow off, and we hope that the fellow he carried will get well. But you will understand that our opinion of you well men over there hasn't changed. We didn't want to take your old hill, anyway. Take that between the eyes and that in the groin, will you!"

The Vagabond, still upright except that he rested one knee on the ground in surveying the field, saw that Captain Herriek was walking up and down as jauntily as ever. With all speed he hastened, expos-

THE VAGABOND

ing himself unconsciously along the whole line of fire, to the Father Vagabond, who was still tickling his men with his wit.

"Feeling kind of mean, ain't they, 's if somebody'd hit 'em in the stummick and the back of the head and chucked red pepper in their faces at the same time. Still, if we hadn't been just lazy and selfish enough to stick, they might be lying nice and cool right in this very spot themselves and plugging it into us. I tell you, boys, there's no way of making an enemy uneasy like getting up close and shooting fast and straight." At sight of the Vagabond, all the pride of a teacher in a pupil shone in his face. "Phil Kearney couldn't have done it better!" he cried.

"There's still a heavy fire and there's no need of standing now, Father Bob."

"Yes, sir, we're going to hold 'em off the road so the other folks can get away, sure enough. I thought you'd take the wrong side of that firing-line, but you didn't, you didn't, you sandy-haired, runaway little cuss, you!" the Captain continued, oblivious of the suggestion.

"For my sake, if no other reason! You are all I have in the world." The Vagabond put his hand on the Captain's shoulder.

"Yes, yes, Billy, that's so. It's you and me and a good trail and a clean, dry camp and happiness, ain't it?"

He sank to his knee. It was not his own volition that carried him farther. He clapped his hand to his chest and the blood trickled between the fingers, while the Vagabond held him gently in his arms.

"It's in a bad place," he said.

THE VAGABOND

The Vagabond's only answer was to press his own hand over the wound, as if to dam the red stream thus, and then he bore his patron to shelter.

As swiftly as words and glances can inflame a crowd, the news that "Granddad" had fallen passed along the line of the Red Caps. They heard it in grim, smothering silence. As if they were a monster with a single body, the demon of hell entered into their spirit and they charged. They drove the Confederates back before their whirlwind of anger and took up a new position, where they remained, dumb of lip, savagely swearing in their hearts and firing as steadily as so many competitors at a tournament for a prize. Dimly the Captain heard their shouts as they leaped from the earth to their path of revenge.

"Is that my boys—my *veterans*?" he asked.

The smile that played around the corners of his mouth on hearing the answer was an epitaph which language cannot translate.

Thenceforth the Red Caps were known by another name. When Lee's skirmishers broke through the under-brush in front of Cemetery Ridge at Gettysburg, a private spoke for all when he exclaimed:

"This ain't any home militia! It's those d——d Granddads again!"

As the old soldier lay lifeless in his foster son's arms, some of the wounded Red Caps who could still stand gathered around him in that awe of the victorious soldier for his leader fallen in the hour of victory which no other situation can approximate. Finally, one of them broke the silence with words coming between the swallows of a dry, full throat:

THE VAGABOND

"Do you think he knows that—that us greenhorns that kind of made fun of Granddad—that he knows we learned to—to love him to-day?"

"Yes," the Vagabond replied, with a solemnity he had never known before, "yes, he knew your hearts from the first, and your hearts were right. He saw you prove it to-day."

For himself, while he looked into the tranquil face of the hero who had shaped his course merrily over all trails in all weathers, he still heard the lips repeating their last whispered words of advice:

"You stick to that girl, my boy. You've got to have somebody or some idea to keep you straight. And don't you feel sorry for me. I'm not propped up on pillows as I always feared. I'm being mustered out just in the way I wanted to be—and I'm past seventy—past the time any of us enlists for."

XXVIII

NOT THE SAME FELICIA

To Felicia as well as to thousands of others that famous day was as upsetting as if the earth had suddenly stopped with a jolt (when the Union line broke) and begun to revolve in the opposite direction. Conflicting and tragical emotions had full play in a nature whose life-long rule of self-repression had been blown away in a breath. Her thoughts were tossed from dagger's point to dagger's point of horror, disgust, chagrin, and indignation, while the slewing carriage bore her helpless from the battle-field.

She had given her goodies to poltroons and heard dying heroes calling in the Saviour's name for water; she had seen the flag of her country trailed in flight before its enemies; she had felt the utter powerlessness of all save brute force and brute skill in human conflict; she had been face to face with death in its worst form; she had heard the fierce oaths of men trying to stay the lightnings with bone and flesh, of generals, so immaculate on parade when their legions seemed unconquerable, as, hatless, coatless, blood-stained, they drove their horses among these same legions transformed into broken-winged birds on panic's wind.

Her idols were shattered; all that she had held secure in the world was wobbling, except her faith in

THE VAGABOND

her principles. The Judge, he whom she had looked up to as great in the law and an exemplar of good citizenship, had turned buffoon before her very eyes. She would never, never suffer herself to speak to him again. While his country was crying for help, how he had lounged, smoking his vile pipe like a village loafer! Not satisfied with boorishness, he would have laid hands on her as if she were no more than a bag of meal. She ought to have known, she told herself when in a certain mood, that she could have expected nothing else of him. Hadn't he pictures of Virginians in his office? Hadn't he laughed at her mighty Greeley for a whooping, ranting agitator? (Haden't that fool Greeley, fighting battles with his spectacles and an ink-pot, howled "On to Richmond!" as if Richmond was a railroad-station lunch-counter? she was crying a few minutes later.) Probably the Judge half wished that his fellow-countrymen, as he called the Confederates, would win. His chosen comrade, Jimmy Pool, that supercilious hypocrite, she was sure was a rebel at heart. How could any man be as cool as he when his side was losing? Hadn't he kept the Vagabonds in idleness purposely? In truth, she did not dare to think of the hateful Jimmy long lest she should call aloud to the very trees and fences.

Her overwhelming fear was that the Union would falter after this repulse. When it had been so hard to work his courage up to call for sixty thousand men, who dared to hope that the weak backbone of Abraham Lincoln would not lean toward peace? If it did, she would take the platform herself against him. She would tell the people that this was only a setback in-

THE VAGABOND

tended by the Almighty to rebuke their over-confidence and callousness and to teach them their power and the needs of the hour.

As the carriage passed out of the range of fire, the driver allowed the winded horses to slacken their pace. On both sides were the flying out-runners of disaster.

"You lazy coward," she called to the nearest one, "go back!"

"Ca-an't! Wounded, ma'am, wounded to the death," he replied, redoubling his pace.

"I've eaten hardtack enough!" cried a New York tough. "Let the Generals do the fighting!"

Miss Felicia reached for the driver's whip and, rising in the carriage, struck him across the face. He raised his rifle as if to fire and dropped it with a curse as the sight rested on a woman's bosom.

"And you, what are you running for?" she demanded of a giant countryman, going as fast as his blown lungs would permit him.

"Ma'am," he replied, as a light broke on him, "ma'am, can't you see I'm scared?" Then the giant stopped. He rubbed his head; he looked back at the scene around him; finally he grinned. "Well, by gosh! If we ain't a reedikewlus lot o' sheep!" he said. "Thank ye, ma'am!" He faced about and retraced his steps at the run. Never again in four years' service could anyone say that he flinched under fire.

And what was this line of blue halted beside the road for a rest on a march in formation to the rear? None other than that notorious regiment whose black name and black deed are still read as a warning to

THE VAGABOND

every recruit to the National Guard of a certain State; none other than men wearing Government coats with Government victuals in their stomachs, who refused a single rifle-blast to aid the nation that gave them suffrage, because their term of enlistment was up on that day!

All the proud courage of those Pilgrim ancestors who had landed on the stern, rock-bound coast welled to her temples in shame for them, and her loathing found expression in an all-embracing phrase.

"Keep your skirts out of the dust, ladies!" she screamed, and passed on.

The stragglers grew fewer with her progress, till at the Virginia side of the bridge with Washington before them she came up with the distinguished advance guard of the retreat, who was as zealous in his task as the famous runner from Marathon. With the handkerchief which he had used to bind his wound he was now mopping his sweaty brow, as he stumbled on perseveringly. He could not have lost much blood, for his face was the color of crushed strawberries.

"We're whipped! whipped!" he shouted. "The whole Union army is flying—horses rearing, cannon roaring, thousands killed and the rest running for their lives! The rebels had fifty times our number. We've been murdered, betrayed—betrayed! I'm going home. I've been shot to pieces enough. I'm going home and tell how we've been betrayed. I know! I know! I'm right from the field!"

"So am I!" said Felicia.

He looked at her enviously. His hard-won distinction was lost.

THE VAGABOND

"*You had a carriage,*" he remarked, plaintively.

Felicia's mind had grown nimble with excitement. Forthwith conceiving a plan, worthy of the Vagabond's fancy in its most outlandish mood, she smiled at Tom Prather winningly and moved to one side of the seat.

"We'll tell the story together. Jump in!"

As they entered the streets of Washington, the vehicle rattling over the paving-stones broke in upon a melancholy stillness. Knots of men gathered here and there were as subdued as the undertaker's helpers at a church-door. Ears hopeful of success, fearful of defeat, were pricking keen for every fragment of a rumor. Tom Prather wanted to alight at once. He imagined the crowd he could gather, as he saw eyes turned curiously toward them. For the first time in his life he was a person of importance.

"Wait!" said Miss Felicia. "We'll take it to those in power."

Why shouldn't she? Wasn't she a tax-payer? Wasn't she an American? She would go to "that man Lincoln" herself and tell him he must—must, must—call for hundreds of thousands of men. Under the impetus of her mingled despair and indignation, she bade the driver turn into the White House grounds. The speed of the carriage, if not the appearance of the ill-assorted pair on the seat, was enough to speak the magic word "News" to the attendants.

"Tell the President," said Felicia, "that we are straight from the front—Miss Hope, the daughter of the late Senator Hope"—as if the name were an open sesame to any august presence—"and Mr. Tom Prather."

THE VAGABOND

A young man passed into the ante-room with the visitor's request, and when the door was opened again, it framed the tall form of the President. He nodded and inclined toward the two in a listening attitude. He was as ungainly as his reputation made him, Miss Felicia thought; yes, and as weak.

"I expect you left our boys pretty busy," he said.

"Tom Prather, here, has the whole story." She turned to the private. "He'd have beaten me if I hadn't had a carriage."

The private realized that he had the ear of his ruler. He was Yankee enough not to be abashed and to make the most of his opportunity.

"We're all cut to pieces! There's a million Confederates! We've been betrayed—be—" There Tom's effort to hold up his end failed. The deep-set eyes of the President seemed to have pinioned for public view, like butterflies in a collector's cabinet, all the lies he had ever told.

"Yes, and Tom started straight home as soon as he found out the truth," Miss Felicia went on. "He wants to be the first to tell the neighbors. Go ahead, Tom—speak for yourself!"

All Tom's strength was occupied in crushing his fatigue cap. He was helplessly, pitifully dumb.

"Well," said the President, "we like to be accommodating. I will have Mr. Cameron provide Tom with a guard and hurry him off at once. It will be a real triumph for him to stand up in front of the town-hall and tell his folks and his relatives and fellow-citizens how he beat the whole army in running away from the Confederates."

This subtle touch of humanity made Tom see the

THE VAGABOND

finger of every man, woman, and child in his community pointing in scorn at him. The blood flew from his face, leaving it pale and grim in determination. He squared his shoulders as if to receive a blow.

"I'll jump out of the train! I'll kill myself before I'll go back there and be called a coward!" he cried. "I'll fight! I'll fight as long as I can see the sight of a rifle, as long as I can wriggle an inch toward the rebels, but I won't go back home alive for you or any other man on the face of the earth, Mr. President!"

The mobile mouth which had been so firm now curved in a smile, and the grave, gentle eyes shone with a kindliness significant of the mind which sounded for the good in his fellow-men and brought it into play.

"Well, as I said, Tom," the President resumed, "we like to be accommodating. Return to your work and if you make a good soldier I'll know of it."

"You've been a father to me!" said the private, who waited not on fatigue or hunger till he had reported to his commander.

"And I've got something to say to you myself, now, Mr. President," said Miss Felicia.

"Yes, Miss Hope," responded the patient receptacle.

"It's the gospel truth!" she cried. "Our soldiers are running like sheep! I've seen great, strong men flying from their own shadows and crying like children."

"Yes, there are faint hearts in all companies and they always seem to go with a good pair of lungs,"

THE VAGABOND

he replied. "We'll have to wait for that sort to get their second wind, just as Tom Prather has here. I guess, though, that the majority of the boys are doing their duty. In fact, I've just heard over the wire of a cavalry charge that wasn't *very* faint-hearted."

"Mr. President, I am one woman and one taxpayer, and I come to tell you, as one woman and one taxpayer, that I have never been as angry in my life as I am this minute. Abraham Lincoln will give up now, the Union will ask for peace, I've kept saying all the way back from that field of horror. Mr. President, call for all the men and money in the country! It isn't a time for honey, now. It's a time to settle down and make war, Mr. President! We must not give up, Abraham Lincoln, we must not!"

Even as she spoke, he had taken the sting out of her words with that smile which was to turn the wrath, the perversity, the plotting of selfish and divergent interests, the enthusiasm of radicals, the indifference of conservatism, into weapons for gaining his one supreme end—the Union.

"I think you'll find that the whole country feels that way. Out in Illinois, when we get careless and leave the barn-door open, we get all the spunkier because we've been neglectful, and we don't content ourselves with just buying a lock. We call in the neighbors and catch the thief and recover the horse. The next call will not bring the fellows who were going South on a picnic. It will bring the men who were too busy to take a holiday, but who are not too busy to fly to their country's aid when it is in danger. Yes, out in Illinois, where they're taking up land

THE VAGABOND

and paying off mortgages and earning the money to send their children to school, they don't go to war until they get well stirred up."

All through the night the disorderly fragments poured into the capital with their disconnected tales. The crowds gazing at the lights in the White House wondered if by to-morrow it would not be Beauregard's head-quarters. General Scott, that veteran who made the Vera Cruz campaign an orderly march, looked out of his window in his old age on all that is repulsive to the military organizer. The residents—for Washington was a Southern city at heart—greeted one another with knowing smiles, believing that in twenty-four hours they could raise their chuckles into shouts.

The man who sprang from the people, who carried the heart of the people with him into high places, knew whereof he spoke. The set faces of Congress, the opinion of the morning papers, showed that New England tenacity did not dwell in Belmore alone. It had spread westward to the Great Valley, where it took root in fertile soil with the promise of a surpassing growth. That day, more momentous than Gettysburg, found the rock-bottom of American nationality. The people of the United States decided that no price was too great to save the one and inseparable from becoming a medley of wrangling republics.

To all, as to Miss Felicia, the battle was lost and a battle past. With her, they sought to know that others were as determined. What would her Greeley say now? The satire of its "On to Richmond!" which events had proved, only made the *Tribune* sell all the

THE VAGABOND

better. Everybody wanted to see if the bellicose editor had killed the famous standing head-line. He had, and was still interesting. No longer in favor of conquering a great, chivalrous people with a pen-thrust, he called for preparations with all the vigor of his overwrought, turgid phrase. Reading, Miss Felicia believed in him more than ever. Then, turning to the news-sheet, she thrilled at sight of the name of the Vagabonds in bold type. "Judge Williams will live!" said a subhead. She clutched the sheet frantically as she read, "The wound of the County Judge of Belmore, that splendid example of self-sacrificing patriotism"—the reportorial style of the day was florid and paid by the word—"who, disdaining rank, saying that trained soldiers should command, left his judicial elevation to serve his country as a private, is not as serious as the first conflicting reports of other journals represented. In his extremity he would have bled to death on the field if a comrade had not gallantly flown through a perfect rain of bullets to his timely succor. This comrade, it seems, was," etc., etc. It did not mention the Confederates' chivalry in withholding their fire. There was no such thing as Confederate chivalry in the *Tribune* office thus early in the war.

"Oh, John!" she exclaimed. "And you—you didn't send for me!"

Why should he? ran her piercing second thought. Had she not rebuffed him? Had she not called him—oh, *had* she called him a vulgar loungee to his face or only in fancy? Anyway, she had believed it and that was just as wicked.

She had come to the army as a nurse and here she

THE VAGABOND

was, idly reading in Washington, while hundreds of men lay wounded and dying on the other side of the Potomac. Price and weary horses were no consideration. She entered the first unoccupied vehicle. She had no sarcasm to vent on stragglers now, no interests, no thoughts except personal duty and a great fear, as the carriage bore her through Georgetown, across the bridge and fairly into the conglomeration of artillery, infantry and cavalry, of the mixed parts of regiments and companies which yesterday had been an army, which weary officers were trying to make into an army again. Over all in the gray light hung grim, naked reality, as over a banquet-table when the dishes have not been cleared away; when cigar-stubs grown rank still lie beside the coffee-cups, and wine-glasses still hold the dregs.

You did not sleep on a feather-bed last night, my son, as the grass stains on your uniform prove. Your good mother did not ask you if your coffee was hot this morning. You did not have ham and eggs and flannel cakes for breakfast. Oh, no; this is soldiering. This is the reality that follows the glorious function of going to war. But your eyes are blue, your hair is fair; you belong to the race that sees a task through, which you will do, as will also your victors, too shocked at the cost of victory, too weary, to follow up their advantage as they would have done a year later. Only, a year later you, too, had become veterans and would not have given them the opportunity. Your ignorance of each other's virtues, your exaggeration of each other's faults, the breaking point of principle and range of the soil's products have locked you in a combat which pride

THE VAGABOND

will continue till one is prostrate, his last resource expended.

Her carriage stopped by the press, as Felicia looked around for a way out she saw at one side lines of men drawn up in order. Begrimed as they were, they were handsome to the eye; as suggestive as a platoon of police marching through a motley crowd, this first brigade to be in order after the disaster. Their commander was a red-haired, red-bearded man, with sword drawn in salute. Another carriage containing the President was approaching. His face, always sad in repose, showed the weariness of his all-night vigil and the realization of the scene around him with its suggestion of the future, pregnant with expense and suffering to the nation.

"There they are, what's left of them, Mr. President," said the commander. "I hope you won't make any speeches. We've had too many speeches in this war, in my opinion, sir."

No sight could have been more welcome to the weary Lincoln than these steady lines. They were the one rift in the sorrows of the last twelve hours. The news of his presence brought the stragglers together in a crowd. Yes, sir, here he was; here was Abraham Lincoln himself. What had he to say about it? They gave voice to the question which the whole country was asking.

The President, mindful of the Colonel's request, responded with a few words that were soothing and encouraging. When he had finished, one of the soldiers broke from the ranks. The Colonel started at this summary breach of discipline, but allowed the man to go on with his speech.

THE VAGABOND

"Mr. President, I come to you for justice," he said. "We've been more than three months away from our armory, though we weren't mustered into the United States' service till after we began guarding the B. & O. We have got business to attend to at home. I started to march out of camp this morning with some of the boys who stand for a good many votes in our county. The Colonel, there, drew his revolver on us. He said, 'You've been soldiering long enough to know what soldiering means. The United States Government has construed that that three months began when you were actually mustered into the United States' service. The first man that steps another foot, I'll shoot him!' Yes, sir, he said that to me. And he drew his revolver—he drew his revolver!"

"Correct!" ejaculated the red-bearded man.

"Well," replied the President, "I've been looking Colonel Sherman over a bit, and from what I can see of him, if he said he'd shoot me I'd be careful—for I think he'd do it."

Was it a laugh that passed along the lines of weary men? Perhaps only a grin, that broke into a chuckle.

"Looks like rain," observed someone, as the orator stepped back into the ranks.

"Good! good!" Miss Felicia cried aloud. "Abraham Lincoln isn't all for votes. He has got backbone, and when the cartilages shuck together the way they did then, there's no bending it."

As the stragglers who had been attracted by the presence of the President were scattered, her carriage proceeded. No one could tell her where the wounded Vagabonds were. This and that soldier did know,

THE VAGABOND

however, that a nearby barn had been turned into a hospital. Thither she hurried. Her heart was throbbing as she looked over the rows of men who had shed their blood yesterday in the name of a great cause; who had not straggled or thought of straggling; who had gone into action with the steadiness and courage that their march out with cheers and sweethearts' and mothers' tears bidding them God-speed had promised; who had given an unfortunate battle the redeeming glory and sorrow of a long casualty list. John was not there.

"Williams? You mean the Judge that enlisted as a private?" said the sleepy surgeon, who had cut and bandaged by candle-light all night. "I took special care of him."

He led the way to the shade of a tree, where the Judge's white face lay still on the background of an elm's rough bark. At the sound of her voice he turned his head and smiled wanly.

Knowing now that even a righteous war was not conducted as quietly as a church collection; knowing that man must be strong for the fight, first of all, if he would win in battle, the dusty coat and the unshaven beard became only the cherished emblems of manhood. What if he did smoke an ugly clay pipe? He had bled for her cause; he had stood the test. On his side, he was as far from indulging in heroics as most real heroes are. (They leave that to the writers.)

"Mornin', ma'am," he said, cheerfully and respectfully. "Jeff Davis doesn't seem to have caught up with us yet. I guess I can run faster'n he can."

"Is it—it—bad, John?" she asked.

THE VAGABOND

"Nothing but a hole; didn't touch the bone, thank you, ma'am. Leaked some, though. That's what makes my legs feel as if my body had to carry 'em instead of the other way 'round, ma'am."

"Please don't ma'am me, John," she pleaded.

"Felicia, then. Privates will get into the habit of deference. Felicia, I tell you when that nephew of mine flashed his sabre and we started across that field, it didn't take any courage. I enjoyed it, Felicia. I was like a horse running away. What if I did smash the buggy and impale myself on a rail? The fun was worth the cost. I didn't care a whoop what became of me, long's I could get in as many whacks as the next fellow. Talk about your leaders! Why, I'd follow the Vagabond right through the gates of—of Jerusalem!"

"Does your wound pain you?" she asked.

"No, not much, ma'am—Felicia, I mean. Not so much as the loss of that pipe. Yes, that pipe—is—gone!"

"You can get another," she said, sympathetically.

"Not as ripe—never! Why, it was like keeping a box of peaches on the dining-room table, just mellow enough and not too mellow, the year round. After I'd slept on it and guarded it the way I had, too! You don't suppose it would do any good to advertise in the Washington papers, do you?"

"I'm afraid not, if the Confederates have it," she said, earnestly.

"Well, I couldn't smoke it now, anyway. Hosea could, though. My idea was to let him have it altogether till I got well. He saved my life, Felicia—yes. Hosea Pillsbury, the town drunkard, did. He's

THE VAGABOND

the proudest piece of work I've ever done. If every one of us who stood up and made speeches full of advice the way I used to could say that he had reformed just one human being, what a different world it would be! Yes, Felicia, I've made an upright, sober man and a good soldier of Hosea, and he has paid me back—how quickly, how munificently!"

"It was your idea. It was—it was like you—like *you*, John," she said, tremulously.

For an instant he looked into her eyes before he threw off his mask.

"Felicia, do you know what I was thinking of when I was knocked off my horse and lay there on the turf, with the shouts and firing in my ears? I didn't expect to live, then. I should have bled to death if Hosea hadn't come. Well, a man thinks pretty fast at such a time. All I thought of was you—I wondered how much you'd care. I wondered if you knew—my God! if you did know—if you do know—how I love you, Felicia!"

There was no oratory in this; no thought of the garb, only of the naked feeling of the heart itself.

"Oh, John, John!" she cried, as she sank to her knees and pressed her face beside his. Sobbing from happiness, after a time she said: "I wish you'd just picked me up and put me in the carriage without ever warning me. I"—but why intrude further in the private affairs of a pair who were enjoying the benefits of a liberalizing experience?

XXIX

NEEDING AN EXCUSE

When the handful of earth had rumbled on the unplanned pine coffin; when high officers and old comrades had rendered the homage of stricken hearts; when the Red Caps had paid their last tribute of respect to their drill-master with a crash of musketry, the Vagabond, who had come in silence, who stood at the grave-side in silence, rode away to camp in silence between his two lieutenants, and in silence parted from them. Entering his tent, he opened a small box in which he kept his dear and valuable possessions, and took out all the sketches he had ever made of Father Bob. One by one, his gaze fondled them. Each spoke to him of some obstacle overcome, some happy day or some incident adding another thread to the skein of love that had bound them together. Every thread was now a severed thread, twitching and writhing. Yet no word escaped his lips.

As he closed the box, as he unbuckled his sabre and threw it on his cot and strode out, the expression of his face was still that of the blank abstraction of suffering. To Washington and back, all night, indeed, he walked, until sheer physical fatigue had dulled the racking pain in his head. Upon his return at dawn, his orderly hastened to him with an envelope which

THE VAGABOND

held one of those precious missives now cozened by historical societies or proudly displayed in the home of the recipient or the recipient's family. In his own hand, as he was wont to do when thoroughly moved, the President had expressed his thanks for the charge and offered its leader a colonelcy of cavalry, "with a brigadier's star twinkling near."

"I wouldn't part with Jimmy and Tim! If I could take them with me for my lieutenant-colonel and my senior major!" he said.

Just then reveille was sounded. The Vagabond saw his men, the sixty that were out of grave and hospital, hastening to their places in line. He knew each one's history; his "pet" as well as his surname. The development and the future of each was an object of loving interest and solicitude. There were "Lengthy" Sykes, with a bandage around his head; "Bucky" Smith, who had driven an overland stage-coach; Mikey Hogan, who had scars won while a policeman in Five Points; "Skippy" Ames, who had left the junior class at Harvard; "John Bull" Sutherland, a profligate younger son of a lord, with his English air and manner still intact and his morale greatly improved, and all the others, dear, whatever their faults, because he had passed on each upstanding one at the recruiting booth. And they had stood the test; they were not quitters. Separation from the troop of his affection was no promotion to him; he was a soldier from his citizen's sense of duty, not by profession. A captain of vagabonds he had begun; a captain of vagabonds he would remain.

Later, when he imparted the news to Jimmy and Tim, he added:

THE VAGABOND

"But I'm sure the President will make you a major, Jimmy, and you a captain, Tim, and you can pass on up if you wish."

"Billy," said Tim, "you remember our agreement that night after your father died?"

"Yes."

"You remember that little hill-side, out there in the eternal hills of California—that little hill-side above the mine, where we used to look for wild flowers when the snow melted?"

"Yes."

"Well, I wouldn't give the fragrance of just one of those little wild flowers to be sixteen times a general."

"Good!" said Jimmy Pool, saluting. "That's me, hat and boots."

Tim, as before noted, was not a stickler for military forms. He was the poet of the company; the Captain its soul; Jimmy its martinet. At retreat Tim told the men of their leader's decision in language which made the deed lose none of its charm. They would have broken ranks and surrounded the Vagabond if Jimmy's eye had not been on them. As it was, "John Bull" Sutherland voiced the sentiment of all. Since the battle, Mikey Hogan, to the general satisfaction, had rechristened him "Bully John," thereby confessing a racial prejudice overcome by the spectacle of the fair young Englishman who, in the charge, had snatched a Confederate's musket and plied the butt end after his sabre was broken.

"It's an American custom, I believe, and it's rather appropriate now, I think—we'd all like to shake hands with the Captain," said Sutherland.

"This is one of the good things of life—better than

THE VAGABOND

an extra bit of braid on your shoulder-strap," the Vagabond kept repeating, as he pressed the calloused palms of the gentle-hearted men who, two days before, had furiously hewn a path through a forest of human beings; and he recalled another compliment—yes, it was the sweetest memory of all—of how Father Bob had lived to praise him as a soldier.

To a man, the Vagabonds re-enlisted for the three years for which three hundred thousand men were called—called to make war, not to march gayly on to Richmond as were the first sixty thousand. To fill the vacant places came others, whose history and up-standing figures and faces insured that they, too, were not quitters. They had to learn what the comrades who welcomed them had already learned, that the true blade is not fashioned in the fight but in the workaday forge. The ensuing weeks and months of inaction taught them how the soldier lives through long periods of inertia and drills on the memory of one, two, or three great days' strain and the expectation of another, when columns of men who have been precipitated out of inertia by the word of a general shall march and fight till they drop from bullets or fatigue. It is in the intervals of peace that armies are made; in the battle that all results of preparation pass under the swift examination of a censor as relentless as fate and as impartial as the gate-keeper of the Inferno; for you can as easily build a sea-wall by a wave of the hand as call into existence by a proclamation, or by opening the doors of an overflowing treasury, trained companies, regiments, brigades, divisions, and corps, and able leaders who make fields and groves and rivers a chess-board, and trained companies, regiments, bri-

THE VAGABOND

gades, divisions, and corps their pieces, with whom they play as calmly as with so many bits of wood.

The Vagabond's sole pleasure, aside from pride in his company, was in watching the Judge's rapid convalescence; his most satisfying triumph as the result of his service was the happy day when he saw him and Felicia made one in the church at Belmore. Of course he kissed the bride, who was his aunt in truth, now. His teasing was received in too good part, such was the supreme happiness and self-content of the pair, to make it worth while. (The groom, be it observed, now smoked cigars. Upon his setting forth that he could not bear any other pipe after the loss of the ripe veteran of his campaign, he smiled knowingly, as much as to say that when an argument had served its purpose it should be laid aside.) They spent their honeymoon in Belmore, where there was work to do for them in forming a regiment of infantry whose command the Judge might now accept, especially as he was a married man. His wife never looked at the lieutenant-colonel, Hosea Pillsbury, without feeling a far greater pride in her husband as a reformer than in the eagles on his shoulder-straps.

In idle hours after his return, the Vagabond, sitting in his tent-door, looked out across the fields in the direction of Lanleyton, which once more lay in the neutral zone. No scouting trip called him there; the Intelligence Department did not need two maps. He had to wait for action while recruiting officers gathered in the raw material; while tailors made uniforms; while machine-shops made muskets and ammunition; while lawyers were turned into officers; while the whole was brought together into a composite

THE VAGABOND

thing under the direction of a little major whom a successful skirmish, such as was soon to be of almost daily occurrence, had raised to a field-marshal's command. Yes, he had to wait, when love was calling him; when the mine was calling him. He never received a letter from California that he did not feel the bitter homesickness of one who is separated from his chosen work. It did not occur to him to go back; he could not go, for one thing, until he had told his story and heard a positive "yes" or "no." He had set out to see the war through, and see it through he would.

Captain Herrick's death had given the strength of maturity to his manhood. There was not a day when he did not repeat the Father Vagabond's dying message. More than ever, he felt that his future was bound up with the woman of his heart's desire. Every word she had spoken in his presence was again and again recalled; again and again every impression of her, in pictures that his memory held, appeared before his eyes. Winning her was a part of his fancy, of his scheme of life as he had outlined it long ago, which had become an overpowering passion that might make or break him. He knew that she was back, keeping vigil alone with her servants in the old house, as unapproachable to him as if it had a sea for a moat. Occupied with a business that had nothing to do with the mountain, the mine, and the girl, he must rest almost at her threshold, when in half an hour he could be at her side with that story, that suffocated him for the want of telling, on his lips.

Too often for his patience, when he thought of her, Southbridge appeared, sweeping the floor with his plume, while he saw her radiantly thankful for a "he-

THE VAGABOND

roic relief." Then he would hold Southbridge off in perspective and say, "Here is a flamboyant creature in a silk sash, who plays a guitar, and what he does or thinks is no more matter to me, except when duty shall cross our paths, than if he were any other colonel in the Confederate army"—a view which was always and immediately eclipsed by certain recollections. He could not restrain himself from associating Southbridge with a precipice where there was room for only one. When he made sabre practice he saw a plume dancing over his opponent's head; when he led his men out for the morning evolutions he never gave them a fond glance without imagining that the Virginia Firsts were sweeping across the plain to meet them.

Meanwhile, he needed only to wait for darkness, have his horse saddled, and break a military rule in order to put himself on the road to Lanleyton and leave the rest to circumstance, as any vagabond loves to do. Only the thought of how Father Bob would censure such an escapade on the part of a responsible commander held him back. Go he was bound to, as surely as the temptation and the monotony of camp kept rising to tap the dam of his patience, when fate, in a sable form, took charge of him one evening. Marcus Aurelius, in the rags and humility of a contraband, though he detested the Yankees, had made his way through the lines on his mistress's errand. In the presence of the Vagabond he threw back his shoulders, and his first words were to explain his stricken dignity.

"I'se discountahed some dif'culties an' obsuhved some *sangfraw*, sah."

THE VAGABOND

Having offered the proof of a phrase from a foreign tongue (which he had learned in youthful days while in Paris with his master) that bare feet were purely a stage make-up with a Southern gentleman's man-servant, he took a letter out of his dilapidated straw hat.

The Vagabond had no sooner glanced at the feminine handwriting, no sooner felt the soft linen between his fingers, than, with thrilling realization, he understood that *she* had written to him. Everyone when he opens a folded sheet whose rustle is the preface to tender news, prefers to be alone. He went inside his tent and pulled the flap. The message which he read, at first swiftly and then slowly, as if words were sentences and sentences slow-dripping honey, was plainly enough dictated by conscience and not inclination. It showed a girl who, seeing through the windows of her grief when the mist of tears had passed, realized that she had been a little unfair to one to whom she would be under no obligation:

“LANLEYTON, September 1, 1861.

“SIR: I write this because an apology is due even more to an enemy than to a friend. Its tardiness is owing entirely to me; that it is sent at all is owing to Cousin Richard, who has ever had the faculty of looking on both sides of a question.

“I saw him yesterday for the first time since my grandfather's death, he having been in Alabama on recruiting duty. He told me that you went ahead of your men on the day my grandfather was killed in order to protect our house and its occupants. I had never thought of it in that light. He said that your action could not have been more chivalrous. I agree

THE VAGABOND

with him. I thank you for this. I thank you because not an object in our house has been disturbed. I thank you for your considerateness after my grandfather had fallen and for allowing me to go to the Confederate lines when I might have been a bearer of information. Richard says that you were fully justified by military canons in taking Folly. That I cannot concede. I am obliged to you, however, for returning him safely.

"I regret that my grief, my strong feeling for the righteousness of our cause and the brutal unfairness of yours, made me slow to see that, personally, you were worthy of a better one.

"I am, sincerely yours,

"VOLILLA LANLEY."

When he stepped out of his tent Marcus Aurelius had gone. If it occurred to the Vagabond that this meant that no answer was expected, it did not interfere with his plan. The time for telling his story was at hand. He ordered his horse for three o'clock the next morning.

XXX

HE TELLS HIS STORY

Only his orderly and a sentry knew of his departure. With a good-night to the one and the password to the other, he was outside of the lines. He rode slowly across the fields, his reins slack and his ear keen for any sound of human origin. Dawn found him within sight of his destination. He dismounted and counted the minutes in impatience for an hour or more, watching for the first signs of life about the old house. In the saddle again, he observed the surroundings for Southbridge with critical eye as he proceeded. When he reached the shelter of the great trees he saw Folly held by the groom at the curb.

"Why shouldn't I go with her?" he thought, and halted.

He had, in the sight of her slim, close-gowned figure as it emerged from the door and joined that of the horse, making a harmonious whole, the inspiration which needed only a vagabond's confidence as its ally. Timing Breaker's walk so as to join her on the drive, he met her surprise with doffed cap, a smile, and a question.

"Do you mind if I ride with you?"

"Are you going my way?" she asked, frowning and staring.

"Yes," he replied.

THE VAGABOND

"Then tell me which is your way."

"Yours, so it please you."

She laughed for the very good reason that she could not help it, so easily, so serenely, so pleasantly had he spoken.

"But I don't know mine yet."

"No more do I mine, then," he laughed back, in the mischievous abandon which has play ahead and duty's routine behind.

There she perceived that the magnetism and assurance of this Yankee had led her to bandy words too freely. That instant's view of the little mole playing into the dimple—more becoming than the eighteenth-century patch—and the eyes sparkling—sparkling for him as they had on the day he caught the butterfly for her, the woman's charm replacing the girl's of his fancy—at once gave him a glimpse of the warm, buoyant nature which principle and prejudice held in bonds, and helped him to meet her new mood with his happy manner unchanged.

"Why are you mocking me?" she asked, insistently. "Because you have your men in ambush behind my house? Because you have power? Because you can?"

"My men are back in the Union lines," he replied. "I have come here quite alone, trusting that you will not betray me. I have come to ask a favor of you, to me a great favor, long craved, which you may easily grant. May I ride with you for half an hour and talk to you?" Bending slightly toward her, radiantly smiling, his cheeks flushed, the request came not only from his lips but from those blue eyes, which seemed to add: "It is such a little thing, so easy, and means so much to me."

THE VAGABOND

In that recess of her brain, where a woman conceals the little emotions whose existence she denies, perhaps curiosity had been aroused. Besides, a girl fond of companionship and adventure had had neither for two months. She needed nothing so much as the relief from anxiety and care which only the preoccupation of new experience can supply.

"As you are going my way, yes, for half an hour."

Herself marvelling at her consent, she put Folly to a swift trot, first by the road and then down a lane; while he, keeping pace, said nothing, but beheld and admired.

"Your time is flying," she called, almost commanded, over her shoulder.

"The trouble is that I can't think where to begin," he responded, "and I can't say it when we're going at this rate, anyway."

"Then we'll walk," she said, drawing rein. "The more quickly it is over, the sooner you can return to your duties."

People often speak playfully, as she did, when the ice is thin and they are counting the inches to the shore. His silent presence was uncanny; already she was wroth with herself for not having rebuffed him.

"That's the trouble," he went on, as their horses' ears were on a line. "I thought I'd know just what to say when I started. You see, it seems so improbable, if I step outside of myself to look at it; while at other times it's all very real and natural."

She had a suspicion that this dare-devil's sole object in coming was a flirtation.

"You mean," she said, stiffly, "that you thought

THE VAGABOND

you'd relieve the ennui of camp by riding out to see that rebel girl in the old white house."

"Nothing of the kind, if you please. That day my horse cast his shoe I came to tell you a story and I've been waiting ever since for the chance."

"Oh!" she exclaimed, more puzzled than ever. "Well, 'Once upon a time'—that's the way stories usually begin."

"Once upon a time, yes, that will do, there was a boy——"

"And a girl," she said, being minded of fairy stories, and then bit her lip.

"Oh, I sha'n't come to her quite so soon," he replied. The lights of mischief dancing in her eyes had helped him. "I'll have to begin in order. I'll start the boy at four years. That's not quite as young—not by four years—as I might start him. It was then that he was brought from the city to an old house in the country in New England. He didn't remember his mother; but so far as he knew, his father had failed and blamed her and she had died of grief. The father hated the world only less than he hated women. He was determined that his son should not see much of either. The boy was learning Latin at five, sitting up on a chair like the poor, helpless Sphinx in the desert sands, with no hope of change. And while he crammed, what was he thinking of?"

"Of a beautiful princess, of course," she said, carried on in the humor of the fairy idea, for he was talking well; and bit her lip again.

"You insist on getting the princess in ahead of her appointed time," he said, happily, being hopeful just then, while he was swimming in the flood of her in-

THE VAGABOND

terest, not caring if she did scoff now that the story was sure of the telling. "No, that boy was looking out at the woods and hills where they met the sky and wondering what lay beyond. One day he saw a wood-cut of a mountain, and the ambition of his life became to climb a mountain. He planned how, when he was old enough, he would start and keep walking until he reached one. Then one day he read that in the Urals there were gold and precious stones. So, of course, he must find a mine when he climbed his mountain. Yes, he was just that foolish, that boy—a happy boy, as happy as his father was sad, happy just at the thought that he was going to see the world some day."

"And he didn't want a princess the least bit?" she asked.

"No, not in the least then. There were cuts of them in the books in the library—European, Indian, Hindu—all kinds. The only little girls he had ever seen passed up and down the road in buggies. He had never had a chance to talk to them."

"Then he ought to have lost his heart to the first one he met, and—in the story—climbed the mountain and brought the mine home in a chamois bag to the girl and lived happily with her ever afterward. Only, he wouldn't in real life. He would fall in love with the next girl he met, and so on, and reach forty a bachelor, following the same pastime."

In this way she kept in evidence, with feinting thrusts, the lance of her sarcasm, to let him know that she was armed. She had spoken without the slightest idea of what was coming, while he thought that memory had suddenly recalled him to her and

THE VAGABOND

she was stealing his climax. But he was determined that nothing should keep him from spinning his yarn in his own way now.

"He was an odd boy to other people and he knew he was; but he didn't much care if only he could see the Rockies, whence the Latin grammar had not yet penetrated. That may explain the matter of the girl. One day, when he was seven, he went into the woods to a favorite spot of his, where a tree falling across a brook had made a deep pool. There he saw the princess. She must have been five or six, and she had very superior ways. When she smiled he would have climbed a tree, or jumped into the water, or done anything else at her bidding, and he was a boy who did not like to take orders. He caught a butterfly for her and she laughed and made him let it go."

"Oh, I do remember!" she exclaimed, suddenly, with a flash of recollection. "My father was fishing in the stream. He had stepped out of sight and I was leaning over the pool to pick a lily. I was sure to have fallen in. You seized my pinafore and said, 'Don't fear, little girl; a boy has got you.' It was all play house to me. And you—you," she turned toward him all flushed and stricken, "saved my life—yes, you saved my life! I've never thought of the incident since, but now I see you did." She bent her head and cried bitterly: "I wish you hadn't! I would never have lived to know this old house and plantation and to see their ruin. And it's another obligation—another obligation!"

"That part you are telling, not I. Besides, you are mistaken. Your father was only a few steps away. He would have heard the splash and pulled you out."

THE VAGABOND

"You honestly think so?" her pride demanded promptly.

"Yes, I know it." And he bent forward in his earnestness to save her and him from a false position.

"Thank you. I'm so glad!"

"We've all had our pleasant dreams," he went on, "that were snatched away by the big hand of darkness. So her father came and took her away. 'Good-by, you funny little boy,' she said. That boy never felt so lonesome in his life before. He didn't even know her name. He only knew that she lived at an army Post; nevertheless, she became a part of his scheme. When he climbed the mountain he was going to drop all the gold from the mine into her lap, just as he had the butterfly. He thought he would have a nice shady place at the foot of the mountain for her, but the mountain itself would be a regular old father of a mountain, all warty with great rocks, so he could show her what a good climber he was.

"That is what he thought then"—she had recovered her tone of banter—"and he was seven!"

"Yes, that brings me to the odd part of it—no, not quite yet. I'm telling the whole story, you see, and I'm not going to put the climax in the middle. Unlike the stories that you read, the ladies will have to hear me through to get that. The boy could summon up a picture of that girl at any time he chose. She had a tiny mole on her chin——"

"Oh, that contemptible little mole!" she exclaimed, in a manner that showed how easily one can regret an imperfection that makes for a kind of perfection; and that remark, almost familiar, made him confident,

THE VAGABOND

foolishly so. She was yet dumfounded by this strange experience and its developments.

"Yes, any self-respecting man ought to fall in love with it, especially when it dipped into the dimple, as it always did when she smiled, in return for that butterfly—or for the lapful of gold."

"Because the mole was out of sight?" she said.

"No, because it hid itself so cunningly, as if it was going into a closet to have a chuckle by itself."

"Humph!"

She partly raised her riding-crop in her anger, as if she would strike, letting it fall when she realized that she had set the bait for her own trap; while he continued in the same quiet, smiling, matter-of-fact way:

"The only friend the boy had was a neighboring farm-hand, Tim Booker. It was Tim that he consulted about how big a boy ought to be before he ran away. 'You want to grow two inches more and start about time berries are ripe,' said Tim. The boy promptly measured himself on a door-casing and began to eat so heartily that he had the stomach-ache. Before he was tall enough his father died; and a glimpse of his guardian made him think that another inch didn't count. So he started on foot for the Rocky Mountains, some two thousand miles and more away. But first he sought that army Post to see what the girl looked like a year after he had seen her, and to tell her that he would bring her back the gold as soon as he found the mine. There he met the dearest old man in the world, who adopted him. Together they went to the Rockies by way of Cape Horn. Together they smiled and lived, while the boy grew. What Father Bob was to that boy only the boy

THE VAGABOND

knows, and he never found words to express his love.

“But he had one secret, just one, that he shared with no one. Father Bob did not know the real reason that had brought him to the army Post. From one of the boys there he learned that the girl had gone out West, all a-bumping in a stage-coach. He concluded sadly that he would have to wait and find her after he had the mine. When he grew older he laughed at the idea, but after he laughed he always fell a-thinking and a-smiling in a way that is quite different from laughing. How changed she would be, he assured himself. Once he saw her again he would star-gaze no more; he would find her like other girls. From his connections with the garrisons in California he kept track of her, and the great, delicious event which he always had in mind was the day when he should see her again and compare the big girl with the little girl. You see, he was a dreamer and a vagabond, with only the mountain for company. If he hadn’t been, he would not have made so much of a small matter—a small matter in the East.

“When the boy was thirteen, Father Bob left the army and gold-hunting began. More than once they worked for day’s wages to get a grub stake to start prospecting again. But what did they care as long as the mornings were fresh and they had each other’s company? The troubles of the nations, of the scholars and the bankers were not theirs. Only that boy, grown man, began to wonder if he would ever get enough to take him East to find the girl.

“Again fortune was kind to him and the prophecy was fulfilled. In climbing a peak that took his fancy,

THE VAGABOND

his own peak that he called the Topper, he found a 'pocket.' Oh, you should see the Topper!" he exclaimed, in enthusiasm. "I was the first man ever to reach its summit, and I was quite proud of that, quite. Why, you shall see it, of course!" He drew from his pocket a sketch-book. Forgetting herself, she looked over his shoulder. "There it is!" and he held the leaf for her inspection, "and here," he turned a page, "is the mine, and these others are sketches of our camps and of many people and many things. I am fond of drawing, possibly because it is something my father didn't teach me."

In answer to slackened reins their horses had stopped. Their heads were so close that he felt the electric touch of a strand of her hair blown against his cheek.

"And the odd thing, in the first place, is that he might never have reached the Rocky Mountains if going to call on the girl hadn't brought him to Captain Herrick. That's a creek where I caught two trout for breakfast! And the odd thing, in the second place, is that the boy climbed the Topper because it was like the cut of a mountain he first saw in a book, and there was a spacious, shaded plateau at the foot where—that's three Mexicans in their sombreros! That's a sketch of myself, of the boy, I mean, blowing a fire to make it go. Father Bob laughed so over it that he forgot his clothes were wet!"

She, too, was smiling, though he was too interested to notice it.

"It's odd, isn't it, but it's true, that the girl gave him his heart's desire of seeing the mountains and then gave him the mine. Was it remarkable that he

THE VAGABOND

wanted to see her? There's where we were snowed in in the Sierras, and that's Father Bob poking his head out of the tent after the storm. No, it wasn't as remarkable as it was when he had found the mine, and when he came, scoffing at his fancy, and found—that's the spacious, shady plateau with a stream gurgling through it! You see, the only thing lacking when the boy came down from his mine was the girl to receive the gold in her lap. When he had climbed so hard, don't you think that she ought to be there?"

What woman would be entirely displeased at hearing such a story? What woman would not like to believe that she had been worshipped from childhood as the only one? What woman finds admiration utterly hateful? What woman, too, will not conceal the fact?

She turned her head away in the dizzy second that brings a blush and self-consciousness. She laughed—laughed strangely, if she meant to laugh lightly.

"I think you are the most ridiculous man I ever met!" she cried, in exasperation that she had unwittingly listened to the climax of this impossible tale.

"Have you never wished that you might go to an island and be as ridiculous as you pleased?" he asked. "Isn't it good sometimes to be ridiculous?"

"There is also a time for other things, and your half-hour is up."

She stopped and he stopped, too. She turned her horse in its tracks. He saw that she meant to close the interview and comprehended that her anger was rising.

"One more favor," he said. "I'd like to race you back to the house. I think I have the better horse. I think I could beat you."

THE VAGABOND

He saw in her lips, slightly parting, the mockery that invites contest; in the increasing color of her already flushed cheeks, in the trembling of the little spiral outcasts of hair as she shook her head in contempt, that he had supplied her with a welcome and irresistible means of escape from an embarrassing situation, at the same time that she gratified his whim.

"Never!" she said. "Never, can he, Folly? Come."

Folly replied with his hoofs.

In a race of fifty miles the Vagabond might have had some chance. His horse was a dragoon's and her's a hunter. Her slight form seemed as much a part of her steed as his broad shoulders and great height a part of his. She left him at once and increased her lead rapidly. His pleasure was not in taking the fences himself, but in watching her. He ceased to think of a contest. He was merely superbly happy in doing something in company with her. So hopelessly was his bay outclassed that she had already dismounted when he entered the drive.

"Beaten!" she called, and made a courtesy. "Adieu!" she added over her shoulder in triumph, as her skirt whisked over the threshold.

That was her last word beyond question.

XXXI

A RULE OF WAR

You may hold that he had not gained a single point; he thought quite differently, or, rather, he was drinking too deeply of its glowing details to think of the meeting in the light of progress at all. He had been alone with her; he had told his story; she had listened, yes, smiled in spite of herself; he had spent the most delightful half-hour of his life. If she had left him summarily, the manner of her parting had bequeathed the most cherished impression yet. It was enough for the present that he had found how beautiful were the chambers of that heart whose impulsive beat had burst aside the barriers of partisanship in the brief, enchanted spell that she had bent her head over the pages of his sketch-book.

The next day, sitting in his tent-door and looking toward the South, his reveries, in which her every pose floated past in a close and clinging memory, were alternated with the question as to what his next step in his quest should be. But the decision of this was in the hands of his superiors. A tap on the shoulder brought the dreamer back to the army again.

"You're looking so happy—I—I thought you'd be—worse luck!" said Maxim, of the staff, guiltily. "It's the meanest job I've ever had, and I want you

THE VAGABOND

to understand," he burst out, angrily, "that I don't believe a word of it!"

"Of what? Of what, Maxim?"

"Oh, —— it! I've got to say it, I suppose. I've come to arrest you on the charge of giving information to the enemy."

After the angry denial of an innocent man struck by accusation flashing out of the sky, contempt and amusement twitched the corners of the Vagabond's mouth.

"In that case," he said, easily, "I'd better go to head-quarters at once. And, thank you, Maxim, for your delicacy. Thank you for believing in me. That's worth a lot."

"That's you all over! Thinking of somebody else's happiness in your cool way even under this shameful charge made by some lying skunk with a grudge because you've given him what he deserves. That's what I told the General. Will you take any evidence against that man? It's silly, silly! I said, right to his face. And he gave me a stare and a dressing down and sent me off, si-ir-r-r!"

The General's manner seemed to ice the atmosphere of the tent as the Vagabond entered. Without rising, his only expression of recognition was a nod. The small, unplanned table before which he sat, the chairs and the field-desk, all partook of the rigidity of his youthful yet most mature and stable figure and the set lines of his face. There was as much indication of bending to sentiment as in a riveted steel truss. The Vagabond put his hand to his cap and said the "Yes, sir," which is the bell that raises the curtain on such occasions.

THE VAGABOND

"You are accused of giving information to the enemy under your own hand," said the General, automatically. "The charge comes through a communication to the Secretary of War. In view of your services in the recent battle; in view, also, of an affection for you which I do not deny, I have been granted permission to go into the matter personally before the charge is made public, in the hope that it may prove unfounded. I will remind you, however, that you need make no replies that will tend to incriminate you."

Was this the same genial fighting man who had danced for delight over that mad ride and patted its leader on the shoulder only two months previously, this man with steel-gray eyes fixed on his own? No matter. The Vagabond was not to be looked into guiltiness. He met the General's gaze buoyantly.

"I am quite willing to tell the truth, sir, to anybody and everybody."

"That is a good sentiment," responded the General, and proceeded to his merciless catechism. "Did you, night before last or in the early hours of yesterday morning, leave our lines and go to the Lanley plantation?"

"Yes, sir."

"For what purpose? By whose authority?"

The General partly rose as the questions came with a b-r-r through his lips.

"Of my own desire, to call on Miss Lanley."

"God Almighty!" roared the General, as he struck the table with his fist. For he was, after all, an irritable man, who kept himself encased in mail. His outburst quickly under control, he wondered if this care-free trooper were not making the worst of his case

THE VAGABOND

out of sheer abandon. It would have been so easy to have given the excuse of a scout, he thought. "Did you see Miss Lanley?" he continued.

"Yes, sir. I rode with her for a half-hour."

The General opened a paper on the table before him, being careful not to show its back, and held it out for the Vagabond's inspection.

"Do you recognize that?"

"Yes, sir. It's a map of our position that I made one day when I was talking to Captain Adams. I was just yarning about my favorite theory that a man with a thousand troopers like mine could ride clear around the Confederate army and do a lot of damage, cut railroads and telegraphs and destroy supplies, without being caught; or if we were, our loss would be more than repaid by the damage we had done."

"So they could; so they could!" shouted the General, touched on his tenderest spot. "But I don't say so. I don't want to be called insane, as Sherman is. You've got to wait on the procession—wait till Jeb Stuart shows us how; but—but"—there he stopped and fastened the lock of his armor. "Never mind that, I tell you. When did you see this paper last?"

"When I put it away in the box where I keep my papers, a week or ten days ago."

"You didn't have it with you when you went to see Miss Lanley?"

"No, sir."

Again the General's lips b-r-red and he drummed the table with his knuckles. The Vagabond's gaze had not once shifted from his; the Vagabond's position had not once changed by so much as the flicker of a muscle. The General, used to having others non-

THE VAGABOND

plussed when he beetled his brows, now looked away from the eyes that seemed as careless of his shafts as the blue sky. He sought a new hypothesis. Some seemingly transparent characters knew just where to groove in deception with truth.

"Please look at the other side!"

He scanned the Vagabond's face sharply for the effect of the inscription: "For General Lee from Miss Lanley, who hopes to get more information from the same source."

"It's a lie! It's a forgery!" the Vagabond cried. He leaned toward the General and raised himself on tiptoes, all the force of his nature in his words. "I know it's a lie and a forgery!"

"How do you know?" asked the General, immovable, in his turn, and relieved that he had struck fire.

"I know she would never do such a thing," he said, impetuously, with all the faith of a crusader.

The General was now certain of his clew—an old and familiar one where a man and a woman are concerned.

"Oh, then you don't know by comparison with her handwriting?"

"It's very like her handwriting."

"Oh!" The General shifted his position into one still more forbidding, determined that courtesy was at an end. "In the first place, you are guilty of a considerable offence in leaving the lines without permission—most reprehensible after the trust I placed in you."

No sense was so keen in the Vagabond as that of loyalty.

"I didn't think I was doing so wrong at the time.

THE VAGABOND

You know that once before I made a ride without permission—at Bull Run.” The General beamed; then winced; then b-r-red. “You have been very good to me, sir. Since Captain Herrick’s death I have looked up to you in everything. It is the delight of my heart to serve you, next to—next”—and there, in the impulse and with the candor that was characteristic of his boyishness, he told the story we have heard before. That seemed the only way of making himself understood.

The General’s lips twitched. Possibly he recalled—certainly Mrs. Husted would have recalled—a court-martial for a love escapade of his own. After that, Lieutenant Husted had put on his armor of soberness, an armor which Mrs. Husted could release in one piece by touching a magic spring. The picture of this young man, truth sitting triumphant in his expression and in every word, was appealing. The General would have welcomed the place of advocate instead of judge.

“Have you any enemy who would be guilty of stealing this paper and forging the superscription?”

“Not that I know of.”

“No. The kind that strikes in the dark this way doesn’t make himself known. Hm-m!” The General’s first manner came back to him. “A very peculiar story you tell, indeed, sir,” he resumed.

“That’s precisely her view, sir.”

“You mean—that Miss Lanley does not encourage your visits?”

“Exactly, sir.”

That was strange if she was making a cat’s-paw of him, thought the General. Possibly, however, Miss

THE VAGABOND

Lanley was deeper than he knew and had chosen the best way to bring the enemy often to Lanleyton.

"You know the penalty of this? It is death," he said. "Lax as we are, I believe that you will suffer it. There is one person who can prove the falsity or the genuineness of this signature with a few scratches of her pen, and that is Miss Lanley. There is one thing and one thing only for you to do—to bring her to the Union lines."

"I cannot."

He imagined his men drawn up in line before her door, while he mounted the steps to demand that she should go with him under armed escort as if she were a prisoner.

"It is the only way," said the General. "Otherwise, I must order a formal arrest."

"Wouldn't her signature do?"

"Not unless I saw her write it. Not if you brought it."

"You mean you think that I"—the Vagabond drove his nails into the palms of his hands and his tongue to silence at this cold adjudgment of his word as valueless.

"If she cares to save your life she will come without urging. If not, she is guilty."

"She is not guilty, sir!" He could not restrain that cry for her, though it did dispute a superior's dictum. "I'll go, sir, and she'll come; I know she will."

His face scarlet with the humiliation that he had suffered at the hands of military formality, he brought his hand to the salute and waited for the nod that would speed him on his way.

The General, as he ran his eye over the soldierly

THE VAGABOND

figure, smiled. They were no longer accuser and accused, or even superior and subordinate, but two men with the affinity of personal force and courage. From under his cot the elder brought out a bottle and two glasses. That bottle was never full and never empty, his friends said. When he put it on the table with a bang, as he did now, business was over.

"My boy," he said, kindly, "here's hoping that you will bring the girl and prove yourself innocent. And bear in mind that in an invasion a woman who remains at home to reap only the bitterness of war will use a woman's weapon."

When the Vagabond had gone, as the General put the bottle back in its hiding-place he muttered something about the eternal fascination of Quixotes; then he said aloud:

"There were times when he made me feel mean, as if—I—I weren't a gentleman—confound him! Confound him! I admire him!"

XXXII

“YOU, AGAIN!”

For a moment, with head-quarters behind him, he had pondered over the General's remark about a woman's weapon in time of war. Had he been mistaken about the map? Could it have been on his person and fallen out of his pocket at Lanleyton? No. Or if it had, she never had written the words which conveyed it to General Lee. She was absolutely incapable of such a thing. For his was one of those natures that is never assailed by doubts until sudden conviction removes its trust at a blow. He believed in her, and the one flutter of happiness in this crisis was that he did.

His horror and his determination grew with his comprehension of the charge brought against him, as he hastened along the army street toward his company. He recalled many things. He recalled that his love for her and that deep love of country which makes its triumphs and its defeats your personal joy or grief had been born on the same day. Before that, he had had only the faith of a boy in his venerable comrade, so far as human institutions were concerned. To him, loyalty was an instinct as much as a code. He stood accused of giving information that might endanger his General, Tim, Jimmy, all his men whose hearts had beat with him in the charge, the clank of whose

THE VAGABOND

sabres, the rattle of whose jests on the march, had given him security and pride.

Regardless of the hour and its fitness for the journey, all controlled by the passion which reduced him to a man in the saddle on a definite errand, he set out with twenty of his troop, Tim and Jimmy at his elbows. The pace he set was that steady trot of the long march; his route was the shortest, by the road, as if he were not in the range of that restless partisan, Southbridge. When the event was happy he loved to detail it for the pleasure of his friends. In trouble he could not talk; he could not help keeping his own counsel.

"In a time like this it's pleasant to know that you two believe in me, anyway," was all he said.

They asked no further questions, such is the delicacy of strong men riveted together by affection. Tim, at least, had seen him before when his jaws were set, a red spot flamed in his cheek, and his eyebrows were drawn together.

He had come to know the country around as the generals of a hundred years ago knew their Belgium. At the edge of the little grove, a patch of green in the valley from the upper windows of Lanleyton, from which the Vagabonds had debouched on their first charge up the hill, he halted his company and bade them wait for him. He was not going again into her presence with a force at his back. Alone, still at the trot, he rode up the hill and under the trees once more. The sound of a piano made him stop and tie his horse to one of the trunks, on the inspiration of the wide-open door which showed through the foliage.

Thus did determination riding swiftly to the point

THE VAGABOND

again halt under the brake of love. Walking on the turf instead of the gravel and tiptoeing up the steps and across the threshold, his wish was gratified. When unconscious recognition of the presence of another made her rest her fingers on the keys and turn her head, he was as motionless as a statue, cap in hand, his present suffering forgotten.

"*You* again!"

There was both bitterness and resentment in her surprise, making him realize suddenly how abrupt and ill-favored was his stealthy entrance.

"Yes," he said. "I beg your pardon. It was the music that made me come in so quietly."

"And you have another story to tell?" she said, looking suggestively toward the door that his form barred.

"Yes, I have, more's the pity."

Without waiting for her to speak the curt dismissal which he saw flaming out of her eyes he poured out his tale and his request in even, passionate tones.

"What you ask," she replied, "is that I, a lone girl, shall accompany you to the Union lines on your say-so."

"My say-so?"

He repeated the words as one whose mind sounds in horror the abysses of a phrase's meaning. It was she, now, who doubted his word. He felt, too, with the suddenness of absurdity thrust in bold relief, the brutality as well as the folly of what he asked.

She was affected by his exclamation and the blank look of despair that accompanied it, but the memory of the way he had led her to listen to an impossible

THE VAGABOND

story helped her to recover herself with the thought that she had been affected in the same way when she saw Forrest play.

"Yes," she replied. "I know that part of your tale is true. I did meet you when I was a little girl. The rest? I know, too, from your own account—that you are a vagabond in search of adventure."

He started and put up his hand in mute protest. It had been easy for him to keep his composure in face of the General's frigid stare; but the cold doubt in her eyes made him a poor stumbler for words.

"At least so you seem to me. What reason have I for believing otherwise? What reason have I for playing a part in the affairs of the Yankee army?"

"None, I suppose—none," he answered, doggedly. "It is to save my—my honor that I come to you who alone can save it."

"I know—I—I—it is hard to resist that call from anyone." She paused in thought. "Your General has the reputation of being a gentleman. If he will personally send me the request by another officer, I will send a reply in my own handwriting, and——"

Her sentence stopped there. Southbridge, in the doorway, one hand on his sabre hilt, not thinking it worth while to frighten Miss Lanley by drawing a revolver, with the other hand tapped the Vagabond lightly on the shoulder.

"You are my prisoner!" he said.

If you have ever been caught in such a position, you know how fast you thought, how much faster you may have acted. The Vagabond's instant, overmastering idea was that his capture meant his conviction in the eyes of the General and his friends. Death

THE VAGABOND

was as much preferable to it as sleep is to a nightmare, and escape alone could clear him.

That same trick that had served him once when he stood at a sheriff's side in California must serve him again. Whirling on his heel, with all the force of the movement and the strength of his arm he landed a blow of his naked fist where it would do the most good. Southbridge careened against the casing and his dead weight fell across the threshold. The Vagabond flicked his revolver in the face of his enemy, stunned physically and mentally by his sudden descent.

"You are mistaken," he said.

"Not at all." Before he could be prevented the Confederate had seized his whistle and blown a call. "My escort is outside and will turn the tables again."

The Federal saw the point, and saw, too, that there was no time to be lost in acting upon it. Still covering Southbridge, he stepped backward to one of the great windows flush with the floor. There he glanced into the startled face of Volilla and said, appealingly: "My honor is at stake. I had to strike. Forgive me!" Then springing to the end of the porch, he jumped off.

It was a question of reaching his party before the escort reached him. As he ran, he whipped out his knife, and cut the tie-strap before he bounded into the saddle. Looking back for the first time, as he gave Breaker the word, not a single Confederate, so far as he could see through the peep-holes of the foliage, was in sight.

In meeting trick with trick, Southbridge, whistling for imaginary relief, had thrown the last trump. The

THE VAGABOND

Vagabond's first impulse on realizing how he had been played was to go back and make good his arrest. His common-sense, however, quickly told him that Southbridge, with his pistol cocked, was wishing for just such a development. In confirmation, there was a puff of smoke from one of the windows. The aim was good, for the target felt the breath of the bullet on his cheek. No more shots were fired as he rode across the open space, while both Jimmy and Tim came out from the edge of the grove to meet him; and this Southbridge, watching through his glasses, took as evidence of a larger escort, and profited by it.

Looking back from the grove, there was no sign of life about the house on the hill, and the Vagabond was more than ever convinced that Southbridge was unaccompanied. This was the second time he had fled before his enemy; the temptation of combat called for him to return. But he was reminded in time that he could save his honor only by living; that he carried the message which would lead to proof of his innocence.

He now became as preoccupied with reaching the General as he had been in reaching Lanleyton. In going as in coming, he took the road in file of twos at a trot that the horses could keep up for the whole distance. To Jimmy's suggestion that they ought to take more precautions he replied, with a little laugh of abandon, that he was in a hurry and there was no danger. Had he not left Southbridge behind? He was particularly in a mood to believe it nonsensical that in this neutral zone a goblin in the form of "Ginger" Southbridge's cavalry would receive telepathic notification and fly to any point where a Federal sol-

THE VAGABOND

dier might appear. It did not occur to the genius of the charge, as it ought and would under other conditions, that at the gallop any body of horsemen could pass him at a distance and swing across his path.

His surprise came abruptly as his column, passing through a stretch of woods, turned with a bend in the road. Only fifty yards ahead he saw a long line of Confederate cavalry half-way across the road in single file, evidently bent on a surrounding movement. It was true that no one of Southbridge's men had been within sound of his whistle, and unhappily true that his whole force was riding away to the eastward. Intending to rejoin them later, he had gone, as he usually did when his daily practice rides took him into the neighborhood of Lanleyton, to pay his respects to its mistress.

On mutual recognition, the Federals stopped, and every Confederate, as if his part for such an emergency had already been outlined to him, wheeled his horse to face the enemy. The Federals were two deep, in close order; the Confederates widely separated, thus making escape impossible without contact. The negligence that had kept the Vagabond's force close together made a compact wedge against a thin line. Southbridge in the middle of the road, his height and his position making him tower over his men, called to them in a great voice to close in. But the Vagabond gave no time for the execution of the order. His little command charged.

"Sabre to sabre!" he cried, exultantly, with flashing blade uplifted, not to his own men, not to the Confederates, but to their commander.

While Southbridge was a statue, his hand on his

THE VAGABOND

hilt, calculating and stiffening himself in the properly cold blood of one receiving a blow, the blood in the Vagabond's veins was like wine, and his brain was swimming with the one thought of breaking guard and a thrust as he passed. He was so near he could see his opponent's lips parted in a smile, when Southbridge, as the situation demanded, lifting his revolver instead of his sabre, fired point-blank.

With the readiness of the hound when its prey doubles, the Confederates turned and gave chase to the Federals, who encouraged their horses with spur and shout, leaving, in heart-breaking necessity, as the only occupant of the field, their prostrate leader.

XXXIII

IN HER KEEPING

In falling, the Vagabond had been stunned. For some minutes he lay motionless. Returning consciousness was quickened by the caressing touch of something as soft as fine old leather, first on his forehead, then on his cheek. His eyelids parted with the effort of windows stuck in their grooves, and he saw the bent neck, the questioning eyes and ears of a true friend, who, having missed the living weight on his back, would learn why his rider had stopped playing the game so abruptly.

The wounded man's first dim thought was one of great happiness at the sight of a dumb companion's loyalty, and his first act was an attempt to recognize it with a grateful pat. He tried to lift his hand to Breaker's muzzle, tried as hard as he would to lift a weight beyond his power, and failed. Then he sought the source of his strange weakness. "Don't get scared about a thing till you have a good look at it," he whispered. On the earth beneath him was a clot of blood; in his side a reddish black hole. He regarded it hazily, comprehended that despite it he was still living, and dismissed the subject quite summarily.

His mind became clearer; his strength revived. He looked up and down the road and saw nothing.

THE VAGABOND

The walls of the depression where he lay shut out his view except for a dusty ribbon's length. Arduously, making many journeys with stages of rest, he lifted himself to a sitting posture. The soil, spongy, soft, and red, seemed to recede and then to press close to him, to rise and fall with the throbs of his brain. At last his eyes were on a line with the fields. Now he could see, if the little red spots would not keep dancing before him.

"Southbridge put them there," he thought; "but he didn't know that I could blink them away."

So far as he could discern, no living thing was near. A boulder shut out part of his vista.

"Southbridge put it there," he thought; "but he can't beat me that way."

He made a great effort to look over it, and fell back in a collapse. Had they got away safely? Had his friends, whom his folly had led into trouble, escaped? He looked at the horse, as if making inquiry from one who had seen the finish of the affair. Breaker only seemed to tantalize him with a posture which said:

"I don't understand it at all. You and I—we've always been ahead of all those other horses. Come on!"

The fever resulting from his wound crept upon him. His tongue seemed on a grate in an oven. Water, water!—that would put out the red spots.

"You didn't know water would do it, did you, Southbridge?" he whispered.

He recalled that cavalry-men carried canteens. Granting that they did, then he must have one. He looked toward the rings on his saddle-tree from which

THE VAGABOND

it always hung. It ought to be there—the red spots would get in the way!—it ought to be—yes, it was! If he rose to his knees he could reach it. He started to rise, and tottered over at full length. His arms, trying to break the fall, had been as ineffectual as two straws. For some time he was prostrate, without seeing or feeling or thinking, and when his senses came back it was the thirst-devil who brought them with a lash.

“It’s not fair, Southbridge, to hit a man after he’s down; but you haven’t got me licked—not a bit of it!”

Without a drink he could not reach the canteen; with a drink he was sure he could mount and ride away. He tried to wet his lips against his tongue, and felt only the rubbing of cracked, dry leather, as he slowly lifted himself back to a sitting posture. This accomplished, he smiled with the satisfaction of one who has solved a problem. If he could not go to the canteen, it might be brought to him. Had he not taught his horse a trick not in the cavalry regulations of that day? He looked up at Breaker with the resolve of an army corps entering upon a charge, and with all the strength of voice that he could command he called the order to lie down, and at the same time seized the hanging bridle-rein. Losing his balance, he was prostrate again, with his hopes on the cast.

He saw the animal put out those signs which ever indicate his action to the trained rider, and knew that he was to quench his thirst unless the water-bearer fell upon the canteen or upon him.

“If you trip him I’ll pay you back, Southbridge—so help me, God, I will!”

THE VAGABOND

Himself powerless to move, he watched Breaker's movement as he would the tumbling of the beams of a prison which were to crush him or to give him liberty. An evolution which is done so quickly that the spectators on the benches see only a horse up and then a horse down, was to him a process of many stages, till the knees were bent, the weight thrown forward upon them, and the body was on the ground, close-pressing but not resting on his own, and the canteen lying almost at his lips. He drank and drank, and lo! the red spots were gone. He drank until the canteen was empty and his mind seemed quite clear again, and the whole purport of his position was in range of his comprehension.

"Oh, the gurgle of it!" he said to Breaker. "It sounds like one of our mountain brooks, so cool to taste, so cool to bathe in, so cool to lull you to sleep when the day's journey is done. There's no line of pickets, no riding up and down, no rule of thumb out there. You shall see. You're going back with me when this business is over—this tricking policemen is over—and we won't go till it is. We aren't quitters, my boy. You needn't carry a pack. I'll go afoot on the steep places and ride you only on the levels. But first—first we'll meet Southbridge. We'll be as cool as he is next time—oh, yes, we will."

That was the respite from his misery, the immediate expression of his gratitude and relief to the loyal water-carrier, before he turned to the mission that had brought him, wounded, to the dust. Of his friends' safety he was now confident. He realized that they must have had enough start to make cer-

THE VAGABOND

tain their escape. Fugitive ideas rallying into sequence with pride as field-master, he cried, hoarsely:

"I've run away from Southbridge! I didn't bring her! I've led my men into a trap! I've been rolled in the dust like a boy who falls off a wagon's tail at the crack of the driver's whip! I'd be a baby to go back to the General with a 'Please, sir' and such a tale! So help me, God, I won't! I won't!"

Thanks to the water, he was exultant with a new purpose. Though he must pay in full the debt he owed Southbridge, that, in turn, must wait on his honor. His determination became as high as his pulse. But— His sabre! he suddenly thought. It was not in its scabbard. His sabre—that emblem of an officer's very existence! Yes, he remembered that he had it, had drawn it. It must have dropped from his hand when Southbridge shot him. He looked about, and whispered his joy as he saw it lying three or four yards away—twenty yards it seemed to him. How could it have fallen so far, he wondered, as he crawled toward it. Once he had it in his hands, he hugged it insanely:

"I've work for you, work for you yet," he said, confidentially.

He drew around the scabbard that had trailed at his side, and after trembling efforts the point by chance found the sheath and went home. It had not been so far away after all, he told himself. But the assurance that would stifle the truth was useless. Those three or four yards had been a terrible march for him. The red spots were coming again. Pooh! All they needed was drowning. If he had another canteen full of water he would feel fit for a twenty-

THE VAGABOND

mile ride; it would be easier, too, to mount. As if in answer to his wish, a pool by the roadside, which he had not seen before, materialized.

With outstretched hands, that did not steady his body as it sank, he put his lips to it and drank the mire until his tongue tasted mud. The red spots were gone. With the lurch of intoxication, exerting a feverish impulse, he reached his feet and laughed hollowly to think how strong he was, though he had to steady himself out of dizziness by leaning against the horse; how his plan was already as good as executed. Of course he could mount in the usual way if he chose; but he had better save his strength, when he might, for a crisis. Had not Father Bob always advised that? With short, staggering steps, that he believed to be sturdy, long ones, he led Breaker to the embankment, clambered upon it, and with a bound found himself in the saddle. The cost was the reopening of his wound, which he did not realize. Had he not had a good look at that and decided that it was not worth being scared about?

Through the gathering dusk, riding slowly on the reserve force of anticipation and will, calling out aloud that he was trying to make pain out of a pin-prick, in dizzy adherence to a single object, he kept on till he was before the open door which spelled the descent of his fortunes and his hope of happiness. All his ebbing strength was banked on an effort which carried him to a light in the drawing-room, where she had just risen from a chair by the reading-table. His wound now bled so profusely that his hand, involuntarily placed over it, was red between the fingers. His set jaw, ashen face, and feverishly

THE VAGABOND

glistening eyes, with his wet and muddied uniform, made a picture of war's reality without the drums, the flags, the cheers, and the shouting. She sprang to her feet with a cry, while he was tottering like a strong column undermined.

"I came to take you to the General to save——"

He clutched at the door-frame, swooning, and she eased his fall with her own arms.

XXXIV

DEEPER THAN SHE THOUGHT

The blood from his wound streaked her skirt; the weight of his body brought her to her knees as it struck the floor. In order to save his life she understood that certain things must be done quickly. While with her scissors, snatched from the work-basket, she cut away the cloth from the wound, a servant hastened for cotton, which she stuffed into the vomiting red hole.

With the first glimmer of consciousness, he felt something heavenly cool crossing and recrossing his forehead and making little side excursions down his cheeks. He partly opened his eyes and then closed them again, lest he should frighten her away, and floated on the elysium of her soft touch, thinking of neither the past nor the future. When she saw that he was breathing regularly again, she drew away as if that had made her service indelicate.

"Thank you!" he murmured, while through his half-closed lids he saw in her face still another expression, new to him, an expression so gentle, so solicitous, so soothing that it made him forget all else save the joy of contemplating it.

"Is there anything else—a drink?" she asked.

"If you please. That you put on my face seemed so cool—so cool."

THE VAGABOND

When she brought a glass he tried to rise; impulsively, she put her hand on his arm.

"You must not move. It is bad for you," she said.

So helpless was he that it seemed easy for her to hold him down with the pressure of one slim finger. She held the glass and steadied his head, while he drank the sweetest draught he had ever tasted.

"So cool, so cool; thank you," he said.

When the flow of his wound was stanchd, the servants improvised a litter and carried him up the broad stairs with a gentleness which his old-time training vouchsafed to the African. To the sick man it seemed as if he had been borne a thousand feet toward the skies. His face twitched with pain as he was transferred to the bed; but when he felt its soft mattress and she placed a pillow under his head, he smiled in blissful gratitude.

"How did you let me down so easily when you took me up so far?" he asked.

"On a cloud, sah. Jes' as easy, jes' as easy," said Marcus Aurelius.

"On a cloud," he repeated, vacantly.

His helplessness made him only a brave man and a fallen enemy whose life depended on her care. She would not trust anyone else to give him the medicines which her experience in doctoring on the plantation warranted her in prescribing. After the servants were abed and the house was silent, she sat by his side. The candle threw flickering shadows about the room and over his white face, and now and then he broke into irrational speech. It was a strange position for her to be in. Yet the events had so forced the necessity that she did not think of it in that light.

THE VAGABOND

Her whole interest was in the patient, whose fever increased as the night wore on.

"And this is soldiering," he said, deliriously, "this going back and forth, back and forth—this tricking policemen! It's not my habit. If you put me in a pen I'd do my morning walk in a circle, so as not to have to retrace my steps. A man gets to feel as gritty as the sand in an hour-glass. The army keeps turning him over so he can flow back again through the same little hole. Take a handicap, Southbridge, if you want to, only come on—*come on!*"

When she gave him water he would recur to the cool mountain-streams and the camp-fire's glow. When the torture of pain and thirst mounted to his brain, he was unhorsed, fighting for his life without a weapon. For his strongest delusion was that Southbridge had his sabre. Finally, she brought it to him from the chair where it had been laid in the room below. He put his fingers weakly on its handle, thinking he had it in a grip of iron, and began to banter Tim and Jimmy in the full tilt of action. Once more he was the leader of a hundred vagabonds spoiling for adventure. Lying as if he were dead, except for an occasional turning of his head, he had travelled thousands of miles; he had crawled in the dust in quest of a drink; he had led a charge exultantly—while she saw that he was growing worse.

A strong man expending his last gasp against great odds is far more attractive than a strong man in victory. Aside from the bitterness of a family war, aside from the story he had told her, his determination to take her to the Union lines when his life-blood was pouring from his side, his youth, his

THE VAGABOND

falling with his face toward the goal, and the fact that he was too weak to realize his position, made his fight against death wholly her own. She had done everything she could for him; she must wait in silence for the results, and keep the compresses on his head fresh. Nearness had given him a charm she could not deny. He was a type of man who would be a hero to his valet. If she could have expressed her feelings she would have considered him as a splendid, erring brother, whose chivalry had earned him forgiveness.

Well into the morning she uttered a cry of thanks, for she saw that her medicines were beginning to take effect. His talk, though still irrational, became less erratic, and dwelt more on the things that had made him happy and on those secrets which sanity never imparts. She heard him laying his soul bare, and felt as if she were an eavesdropper; and yet she remained listening. The simplicity and boyishness of a vagabond's nature were revealed, and she knew by the supremest of tests that the "story" was not the pastime of a soldier's imagination. Her breath caught at every mention of her name—a *she* spoken with affection, almost with awe, as if it stood for an unattainable grace.

"A house on a hill-side overlooking grassy slopes, and a great mountain in the background, and good horses and finding gold and bringing home the lion's skin for her—for *her*—and journeys into many strange lands and pleasant places with her—with *her!*" he exclaimed, finally, and fell into the sleep of exhaustion when the crisis had passed.

In the whirl of her emotion, she half wished that

THE VAGABOND

she had not heard him, and she was half glad that she had. She had the pride of her sex; she felt the triumph of being loved in this way—and he was better. His lips moved again, and she bent her head to listen.

“Of giving information against my Vagabonds, my General, my country! There is nothing false in her—nothing! She could not, did not, write it! I will go for her.”

She stiffened, as one does with a sudden resolution, and pressed her lips firmly together. For some time she watched him, but he said nothing more. When she went to her room an hour before dawn, it was to put on her riding-habit.

“You are deeper than you think, as a crisis might show,” Richard Bulwer had told her.

XXXV

THE GENERAL DRINKS ALONE

By fields and lanes and over fences she had ridden as if the success of her mission depended on speed. Her horse's neck and shoulders were spattered with foam; her face was flushed with exercise and the press of autumn air and keen with her object as she appeared before General Husted's tent just as he was about to sit down to his morning coffee. Though a glance had told him half the truth, the lively and charming picture made by the young woman suddenly burst into camp would of itself have caused the spontaneous alacrity with which he sprang to her side to assist her to alight, leaving the officer who had received her from the amazed corporal of the guard feeling rather awkward.

"I am Miss Lanley. Our house is some distance outside your lines," she said. "Your Captain Williams came there badly wounded late yesterday afternoon. I nursed him through the night. I did not send for a Confederate surgeon, for I feared that he would make him a prisoner, and I thought it unfair under the circumstances that he should be made one. If you will send a surgeon back with me, I think I can assure you that he will run little risk of capture."

The General bowed from the hips—for the first time in many weeks.

THE VAGABOND

"Captain Jameson, go to Colonel Whipple, of the Second Maine, and present my compliments and tell him to send a surgeon mounted."

The Second Maine was clear at the end of the line, and Captain Jameson, who had not spoken to a pretty woman for a month, showed, under the mask of his humble salute, that he fully realized the fact.

"Good-morning, sir, and thank you," said Volilla to the Captain, and, slightly oblivious of the General, she patted Folly's neck and called him a hero. The very deliberation with which she did this was indicative enough, in a girl of spirit and self-possession, of how great was the strain of her position and how distasteful her journey alone to the enemy's camp.

"Take this horse and rub him down thoroughly," the General said to his orderly.

"And walk him a little. He's had a hard run, and it's chilly this morning," she added.

"I'd carry him, Miss, if you said so," the orderly blurted, though orderlies are to be seen at all times and never heard. *He* had not spoken to a pretty woman for *two* months.

If it was her intention to give the impression of a visitor of state, who had come to do a favor and would go when she pleased, she succeeded admirably.

Inclining from the hips and smiling, the General held back the tent-flap for her to enter, while the stern warrior had something of the feeling of an inveterate gossip who is about to have a long-puzzling mystery explained.

"Thank you." She laid her riding-crop on the table and remained standing, though he bowed her to a seat. "I have come, too, to disprove a malicious

THE VAGABOND

and false accusation against Captain Williams, based on my signature, I believe. Are these your writing materials?" She turned to the field-desk. "May I use them?"

"Yes, certainly," replied the General.

He was as flustered as a young volunteer in the presence of an old regular.

"What shall I write?" she asked.

He understood her quick appreciation of method, and he was inwardly paying the Vagabond's taste a compliment as he unlocked a drawer in the desk and took out the map.

"Now, if you please," he said, and read the superscription in her own name. She copied it in a manner as off-hand as if she were taking notes on a lecture, and handed the result to him.

"Not the same at all," he said, immediately he made the comparison.

"Of course," she replied.

"I knew that he was innocent! I knew he was!" the General exclaimed, in boyish delight.

She rose, and her manner asked if that was all. But he would listen to no refusal; she shared his breakfast.

"There is one more question," he said, as he handed her an egg on a tin plate. "The forger must have known both you and the Captain. Do you suspect who he is?"

"I am quite certain. He has forged my name once before—Aikens, an overseer discharged for fraud and worse. I believe he is an abolitionist, now," she added, a little maliciously.

"Likely!" said the General, fiercely, "and a quar-

THE VAGABOND

termaster—the worst combination and the worst enemy the Union army has. I am looking for Mr. Aikens. I remember him, a man in a pepper-and-salt suit and a linen duster with the tails flying.”

“Yes, always flying.”

Thereafter, until the surgeon came, they talked of the Southern officers with whom the General had served in the regulars or had been schooled at the Point. There was a peculiar absence of any feeling toward them other than that, in choosing sides for a game, they had happened to be his opponents. When he had helped her to mount, he said:

“Tell the Captain that his General sends his love, that no one of his companions was injured, and that they await his return no less anxiously than I.”

“He will be as safe in my house as I can make him until he recovers,” she replied.

“The Captain is a splendid fellow. May I congratulate you?” he went on, a little mischievously.

Too late, he saw the error of this remark; too late, he saw that he had been the first one to inject into her visit the disagreeable, which he of all men would have guarded against at every turn.

“Congratulate me!” she exclaimed, contracting her brows. “Congratulate me on having to come unaccompanied to the Union lines!”

“No; on saving the Captain’s life.”

“Oh!” She understood now. Her glance of indignation and anger made him feel smaller than he had since his first day in the awkward squad at the Academy. She was imperious; she was magnificent. “I wish you to know, sir,” she said, “that the sole object that brought me here was to remedy

THE VAGABOND

an injustice done by a loathsome Yankee to a brave Yankee who could not speak for himself. When Captain Williams came wounded to my house I made it a refuge, in the name of common humanity. I regard him as I regard you and every soldier here—an unlawful invader, to be fought to the bitter end. Good-morning!"

Having seen the pair depart, the surgeon feeling decidedly up in the world, the General entered his tent and did something quite unusual. He brought out that bottle and a glass and drank alone.

XXXVI

SOUTHBRIDGE APPEARS

Long before the journey was at an end, the surgeon, unused to riding, had no question about his preference for vehicles, on the score of dignity if nothing else. The saving grace of down-East humor which never surrenders to a predicament kept him in favor with his companion. When Folly took a fence and his own horse refused the obstruction, he said:

"We have strict orders not to destroy the enemy's property. I wouldn't like to be court-martialed for breaking that top rail."

So he dismounted and removed not only the top one but four more, as he did in other places.

The old coachman and the stableman met them at the curb, while the venerable Marcus Aurelius stood in the doorway, feeling something of his old-time importance as he told of the condition of the patient.

"He jes' woke up an' smile an' say, 'Yo' here wid me all night?' 'No, sah,' I say, 'Missy Lanley was.' At dat, he look like he had a lump o' sugah an' could tas'e him all de way down to his toes. Den he say, 'Is she restin' now?' I say yo' was, t'inkin' dat de bes' way to make him res'. 'Peared jes' like he had 'nothah lump o' sugah."

"I'll announce that you are coming," she told the

THE VAGABOND

surgeon, impulsively, "so you—you'll not take him by surprise."

It was a poor excuse, as she realized with a stinging in her cheeks before she was at the top of the stairs, when she thought of the knowing turn in the surgeon's mouth and the twinkle in his eyes. In truth, she wanted to tell the sick man the news with her own lips; to enjoy his reception of it as a reward for what it had cost her. That was all, quite all; the same feeling that makes you watch the face of a friend when he opens the box that contains your present.

Entering his room softly, not so much from plan as from the dramatic instinct that is inherent in us all, she found him looking vacantly at the wall. At the same instant that he became conscious of her presence she spoke in smiling triumph, in the spirit of the swift ride which still thrilled her, the happy news that she had brought.

"You are proved innocent! The General sends his love and wishes for your speedy recovery."

She saw his face change, as if morning had flashed out of darkness.

"It was you who did this for me!"

Such strength as he could command brought him to his elbow. Then he noticed that she was in her riding-habit, and that there were spatters of mud on her skirt.

"You have been to the Union lines on my account! *You* have done all this for *me*!" There was something in the way he spoke the "you" that made her regret his knowledge of the fact. "Now you must rest; you will rest," he added, fondly, entreatingly, as

THE VAGABOND

if to say that this must precede his speaking of many things.

"Yes. I—I only came to tell you."

She did not want to look into his eyes again; she sought an opportunity to retreat.

"And Jimmy and Tim and my Vagabonds? I must know that!"

"All safe. They wait for you."

"And you have brought this good news! *You* have done all this for *me*!"

He sank back on the pillow, the two pronouns joined in the refrain of his happiness. She did not wish to hear them repeated again, and hastened out without having mentioned the surgeon at all. While he was with the patient she was writing a note to Mrs. Bulwer, an imperative note, which she sent with all haste.

When the surgeon returned from the sick-room he was in high feather.

"Look here, did he ride four miles with that wound?" he asked, breezily. "Or is it an illusion?"

Everything, including his own acts, seemed to speak in the Vagabond's praise, she thought, grudgingly.

"Yes, a good four miles," she replied, almost dismally.

"He's a wonder. That bullet played hide and seek all about his ribs. Fortunately, it got tired near the surface. A slit of the skin and it was out. He's terribly weak from loss of blood and fever, but time and careful nursing are all that's needed to do the trick. I know from the marvellous way you have looked after him so far that he will get both."

THE VAGABOND

Thereupon, that Yankee surgeon, who had a way of caring for himself, asked if he might have a cup of coffee. This developed the fact that he had had no breakfast, and, furthermore, that the black cook had begun to prepare one with plantation extravagance as soon as the return of her mistress was announced. At the head of her own table Volilla made use of her opportunity with the art of an adept.

"I have done something for one of your officers, and now I am going to ask one of your officers to do something for me," she said. "The ride I made this morning was an act of mercy. Promise me that you will not let it be generally known—or anything about his misfortune in coming to an enemy's house."

The surgeon recalled the patient's surprise at seeing him after he had been "announced."

"Why do you smile?" she asked, trying to keep her indignation under.

"I was thinking how fortunate Captain Williams is. Of course I make only one report—to the General. Not a word to anyone else, believe me."

"You are very good," she replied.

"I don't know about that. The breakfast certainly is. It may be acting through me as an agent." He smiled apologetically at his third egg. "You did exactly the right thing, medicines and compresses both, last night," he went on, changing the subject to a matter that excited his professional admiration. "It was a little surprising—not quite expected, I mean, that you should know."

"One has to know on a big plantation like this," she responded, "or else one wouldn't be doing one's

THE VAGABOND

duty. I remember I sat up all night with a slave who was ill in much the same way. So I had a specific experience—isn't that what you call it?"

He looked wonderingly at the great sideboard, the paintings, the slim, regal figure sitting opposite him across the snowy linen, all standing for something with which he was familiar only by reading.

"You sat up all night nursing a slave—a nigger!" he exclaimed, in his honest surprise.

"Oh, yes. I know we don't do such things in 'Uncle Tom's Cabin,' because Mrs. Stowe was never in the South."

"And you—did you read 'Uncle Tom?' "

"Yes, as much as I could. Cousin Richard read it clear through, smiling all the time. My grandfather read two chapters and threw it into the grate. But let's not talk of that. You feel very strongly and we feel very strongly, and the talking time, as Richard says, is over, isn't it?"

As she diverted the conversation into other channels she was as unexpectant of any unfriendly interruption as he. More than once the difficulty of Southbridge's inevitable appearance had occurred to her among more pressing thoughts, and she had told herself that she must be on the lookout for him and find a way to keep the knowledge of the Vagabond's presence from him. When she heard the clank of his scabbard on the hall-floor she knew that there was no way of escaping a scene, and she awaited his entrance stoically. First, he caught a glint of the surgeon's guilt on a background as blue to him as ever red was red to a bull, and his hand sprang to his holster; then he saw who sat at the other end of the table—saw

THE VAGABOND

her acting the host to a Yankee, and a blank stare was followed by an explosive:

"Sir!"

The surprised surgeon looked from the big cavalryman to his hostess, as much as to signify that she had his credentials.

"Good-morning, Jefferson," she said, affably, rising. "Let me introduce Captain Langholm, who is on an errand of mercy."

The surgeon rose, but Southbridge did not come a step nearer.

"You may breakfast in a patriot house, sir," he said, "but I assure you, you will sleep in a patriot prison."

"If the lodging is as good as the fare, I should not mind, except for your company," the surgeon clicked back; for he was not made of putty.

This was the match to the hot-tempered Southbridge. He drew his revolver, and so did the Federal. There might have been an exchange of shots if Volilla had not stepped between them.

"This is my house, Jefferson. A Virginian is the last to interfere with another's hospitality," she said, simply; and her remark made shame muffle his rage.

Without any protest except a dogged shrug of his shoulders, he withdrew.

Leaving her guest to care for still another egg, which he proceeded to do nonchalantly—possibly it was a relief to him to meet the kind of Confederate he had read about—she closed the door into the hall and was alone with Southbridge. Her instinct told her that the direct road was the safest and best. Without any suggestion of a certain other story, she

THE VAGABOND

related how Langholm happened to be in the house, trusting to her tact, frail weapon that she feared it was, to accomplish the rest.

"We have hospitals, we have surgeons," he said, his animus overwhelming him again. "He was my legitimate prisoner; I rode back and found him gone."

"Yes, just so. You fail to recognize the joke on yourself. You deserted him and now he's mine," she said, laughing.

"Because one Yankee forges and gets another into trouble, are we going to help the other out? Because he is wounded, is he specially immune from the laws of war?"

"No, Jefferson, he's on neutral ground. I am bound to be indebted to no Federal. I am paying him back for his generosity and kindness when his company protected this house. You have always been welcome here. Your regiment carries the flag I made. Now I'm going to ask a favor in return. This house must be a sanctuary for this man until he is well."

"There is something more—something between you. Your head has been turned. You—you are infatuated!" he cried, and bent over her almost threateningly.

Then she became quite confident of attaining her object. She threw back her head and took her time for a trilling laugh of ridicule.

"Infatuated!" Her tongue played with the word as if it were a ball of variegated colors. "If I were, do you think I'd have told you he was here? Don't you suppose I would have gone at once to the Union

THE VAGABOND

lines to save him? Infatuated with a California miner!" Of a sudden she grew earnest. "Infatuated with a Yankee! You—you thought that of *me!*" she cried, in most sincere offence.

In one of her moments of splendor she had given him again a glimpse of the value of the prize he hoped to win. He seized her hand and kissed it.

"You forget that I live for you! I cannot wait! I must know! I formed the Virginia Firsts for you. I lead them for you. I shall win victories for you."

The big man with challenge beating out of his eyes a moment before had become abject. Yet, serious as he was, he could not help speaking with an age-gone grandiloquence.

She drew her hand away.

"Remember your promise! Not again till the war is over. Your duty is not that of courtier now, but soldier."

He stiffened in compliance with a bargain that he had agreed to.

"There is another thing that made me kind to him for your sake," she said. "You would scarcely want anything but an open field against him, I know."

He bristled at this suggestion, ingeniously put.

"He seemed to think it a personal fight. When he was wounded he said that he called 'Sabre to sabre' to you and you fired at him with your revolver." She wanted to make all the points she could, in justification.

"It was war, not a duel," he said. "But I remember—he did say that! If he makes it a personal matter I will express my regrets. I want no odds from any Yankee!"

THE VAGABOND

In the sway of this passion he parted from her. He fully intended to keep to his word as he ascended the stairs. It was the Vagabond's smile, after his surprise had passed, that deterred him—a smile of amusement, in face of the fact that he was probably a prisoner again, at the plume in the gentleman's hat, his long, curling mustache, his knotted silk sash, and his gala appearance in general.

"When you are well!" was all that Southbridge could say, tapping the hilt of his sabre.

"Yes, when I am well, with pleasure," was the quiet reply, sharper-pointed than the surgeon's knife.

XXXVII

WHEN THE BACK-LOG FELL

The Vagabond had the fleeting, whimsical impression that it was very good of Southbridge to wait, and then, in the exhaustion from the surgeon's operation and in the sweet consciousness of the great news she had brought, he slept.

When he awoke the afternoon was waning. In the clearer vision which his rest had given him, he began to review the events since his meeting with Southbridge on the road. His sense of proportion was drowned in shame, which began with the realization that his enemy had overcome him; which increased as his memory picked up scattered sayings and doings. Convinced that he had talked much while she ministered to him overnight, he tried in vain to recall more than the tenor of what he had said.

"I whined, I explained, I made excuses," he thought.

Neither scowling, nor staring vacantly at the wall, nor drumming his fingers would bring more than this concrete example of his humiliation: that he had whimpered—to use his own word—about Southbridge taking his sabre, and she had appeased the little boy by bringing his plaything. Afterward, as before, all was a blank.

"Oh, you baby! you baby!" he told himself. "You

THE VAGABOND

aren't fit to be out of skirts yet, and you presume to command a company of grown men like the Vagabonds!"

Marcus Aurelius, making the last of many excursions on tiptoe to see if the patient was awake, now appeared.

"Well, sah," he said, "yo' eyes is pretty bright an' so's yo' prospec's ef yo' keeps yo' *sangfraw*, sah. Dere's nothin' like *sangfraw*, sah"—a most dubious suggestion to one who was barely out of danger.

"And cold water, too, Marcus. I feel too sticky for words. A sponge and a basin, and the cleaner I am, the higher I'll put you in the list of immortals."

With a positive grace the old fellow bathed the feeble cavalier, changed the sheets, shaved him and combed his hair, meanwhile narrating his wonderful experiences in Paris forty years ago, much to the disparagement of all French valets. Then he proudly surveyed the result, who, in the glow of his toilet, was an optimist, again thinking how to redeem his past.

"Dere, sah, now yo's fit to receive callers."

The Vagabond's picture of himself had little in common with the one that Volilla drew upon her own awakening. She had already in her heart given up the idea that he was a play-actor, except of that magnificent kind that believes in only one part, his own. It was the compelling force of the man, his tantalizing, ubiquitous ability to put himself in an heroic pose, that she now recognized in that heart to heart communion that every woman knows in the silence of her own bedroom.

She had been indiscreet, impulsive, romantic, she told herself. She might have sent Marcus Aurelius

THE VAGABOND

to the Union lines in her stead, and she might have avoided other acts which, abstractly considered, would represent more than a nurse's interest in a patient. Even when she faced Southbridge she had been conscious of a personal feeling, a feeling of downright partisanship for the wounded man because of his distress. He had won her admiration by that display of high purpose regardless of all selfish interests which is the most appealing of all masculine traits to the feminine mind, be it ever said to woman's credit.

"What I did," to put her conclusion in her own words, "was out of a natural desire to pay back obligations which he has wickedly increased, but which he shall increase no further."

She arose confidently; and confidently, in due course, she went to his room. By this time he also was sure of his part.

"You have rested?" he asked.

"Yes, beautifully; and you?"

"Slept soundly and awoke with a firm purpose. I must state it, so that we shall start fair." And with that he smiled mischievously. "I—am—not—going," he said, slowly, "to—propose—to you—every—day!"

Again, with the unexpected, he had passed over her foil by a stroke of delicacy which said that he realized her position and had determined to relieve her from any anticipated embarrassment. Nevertheless, as a matter of fence, her two-worded comment was sarcastic.

"How thoughtful!" she said.

"But I'm going to propose just once—before I go away. Is that agreed?" he asked, lightly.

THE VAGABOND

She puckered her brows.

"Yes, just before you go away—just once."

"Thank you. Now that's settled, please tell me the one thing I most want to know—how is my horse?"

"Very comfortable in the stable. We hope to care for him as well as we shall for his owner."

Grateful now, after the surprise of his remark had passed, that he had relieved her from any feeling of restraint, she seated herself in the chair which she had occupied through the night.

"I am afraid I shall be your guest—your charge, I mean—for some time to come," he said.

"Say guest, please, especially as you are not going to propose," she returned, smilingly. "You are very weak, the surgeon says, but your recovery is only a question of time."

"Yes, that's it; that's what I'm trying to realize—that I am very weak. Every now and then I make an honest effort to raise my arm to convince myself that I am not shamming. It all seems so uncanny and preposterous to a fellow who has never been glued to a bed before. Yesterday I could bound into the saddle without the help of the stirrup; to-day I would need a litter and the smelling-salts to get downstairs. It will teach me humility and thoughtfulness. I shall have more sympathy with the sick and the failing hereafter."

While she wished for the fiftieth time that he could not talk so well, her fingers, moving on the table aimlessly, touched something small, hard, and heavy.

"That's the little thing that the doctor cut out—the one Southbridge gave me," he said.

THE VAGABOND

She shuddered, and held the bit of lead up quizzically for inspection.

"I shall have to return his loan," he added, pleasantly.

"This same one, I hope."

"No, that would hardly be fair; his was not second-hand. No, a new one!"

The blood left her face. She laid the leaden serpent's sting back on the table with trembling fingers.

"Please," she pleaded, making a dismal effort to smile, "please promise me that you won't go out of your way to meet Colonel Southbridge. He is my friend. He—he has the secret—he consents to your being here. Please promise!"

"She loves him!" he thought, only that; it was enough.

"I'll not—I'll not go out of my way, I promise," he said, finally. "He is one Confederate among many. It is unlikely that I shall ever see him again."

"Thank you. I—I ask it because I know you would win. The way you looked when you said that made me realize it, weak as you are. You would win—you always win—that's the worst of—of you!" she cried.

He shook his head.

"I didn't mean to break out that way," she continued. "I should have waited till you were stronger before I asked you to make promises."

"It isn't much just to win. If it comes to that, I didn't win when I met Southbridge on the road. I have not yet—the great fancy of my life, you know"—but he checked himself.

And he was as good as his word about proposing

THE VAGABOND

and better, for he never mentioned that there had been a story or even the sketch-book he had shown her when he told it. His gratitude was expressed in his quaint conceits and exuberant fancy, in pencil-drawings of Marcus Aurelius, Josephus, and other notables, making a merry convalescence for himself and good company for his hosts. Mrs. Bulwer, who had thrown up her hands in matronly horror on learning of the situation, and who had at first regarded the patient with distant censoriousness, ended by wondering how he could have been born north of Mason and Dixon's line. His manners, which she expected to find barbarous, she explained by a gentle line of ancestors whose fortunes had dwindled, leaving the present generation to make his own way in the world.

Mrs. Bulwer read to him, and both nodded in the process. Volilla also read to him; and listening to her rich voice, which gave to *r's* slow and glowing recognition, and watching the unconscious play of her expression, he was as wide-awake as happiness can make a man. To have pressed his suit, besides being ungracious, which was his first thought, would have deprived him of association with her natural self in the routine of her duties as mistress of an estate. It was she, because she had the talent, rather than her aunt, who was always doing little things to please him; she who showed the most intelligent interest in his stories of the trail, which he told dryly; she who had Breaker brought into the yard the first time his owner was well enough to be carried to a chair by the window. The bay's coat shone over plump sides and solid quarters.

THE VAGABOND

"I won't fall off again, old fellow!" the Vagabond called. "You see," turning to Mrs. Bulwer, "he's one of several who have saved my life. I thank you for being as kind to him as you are to me."

"Now, I've always said that a man who loved a horse and whose horse loved him could not be so very bad," she told him.

"Thank you, Mrs. Bulwer," he replied, with mock solemnity.

"Of course, they can be bad if they try—by invading a sovereign State," she rejoined, with a reproving shake of her finger.

He received her little reproofs pleasantly or met them with banter, or, sometimes, when she tried to bring him to her view of the war, with the logic of his simple experience. Between him and Volilla, however, no argument was ever passed on this subject. Both shunned it instinctively. Only once was it mentioned, even indirectly, and then absent-mindedly, when her needle was slipping in and out of another Confederate banner.

"You make the stars so well," he said, "that there ought to be more."

"The flag is not for your side, sir; it is for the fearless minority."

There was in her every act kindness and delicate hospitality, which he had made easy for her in one sense, which he had made hard for her in another, in that he had the faculty of doing the right thing when it would have served her sense of partisanship better if he had done the wrong one.

As soon as he could make his way downstairs without help (the ladies watching and Marcus Aurelius,

THE VAGABOND

most pessimistic, at his elbow), he joined them at dinner. In honor of the event the kitchen became an African tyrant's stronghold, and the silver, some of which the Vagabond had taken from Aikens's pockets, adorned the table and the sideboard. For all the talk of that meal or of any other that followed, no stranger would have known but he was a welcome neighbor or a relative. With the feeling of one who is strongly held and strongly called, he looked forward to the time of his going. His desire to be with his men again was balanced by the fear of putting a dream to the alternative of coming true or of being shattered.

Finally, he set a Monday for his departure. Mrs. Bulwer said that he must not think of such a thing; Volilla counselled wisdom, and Marcus Aurelius cited a number of relapses, not to say deaths, as the result of over-confidence, which were, doubtless, the fruit of his resplendent tropical imagination. So they compromised on Wednesday, which came all too quickly. At times, he had read a line which he thought was hopeful; again, she was a sealed book to him. Could she have done so much for him merely in the name of courtesy and obligation? Alas, that was the fine thing about her; she could.

He thought that he would like to exercise the privilege which he had reserved for himself under the same circumstances that had favored the telling of his story. She was never so charming to him as when on horseback; words had never sprung so easily to his lips as when they bent their heads over the sketch-book in the sheltered lane.

"I ought to have a little practice for my journey,"

THE VAGABOND

he said at the breakfast-table Tuesday. "May I join you for your ride to-day?"

"The doctor couldn't think of allowing such a thing!" she declared, promptly. "I'm surprised at you, indeed, Captain—you a cavalry-man! Why, you would be so lame that it would be torture to mount to-morrow. No, no," playfully, "I'm responsible for your care, and I sha'n't let you have Breaker to-day."

There was no going back of her reply, though he could tell by the flicker of a glance that she gave him what its real object was.

Neither in the morning nor in the afternoon did she permit herself to be alone with him. At dinner the talk ran on California, the safest of subjects. Her sense of hospitality and her interest in the guest, of whom she had grown exceedingly fond, kept Mrs. Bulwer in the drawing-room till eleven.

"I'll sit here for a time, if you don't mind. I like the fire," he said.

The evenings were becoming chill, and the logs had been lighted after sundown.

"You mustn't stay up too late. You'll need all your strength for to-morrow. Good-night," Volilla said, leaving the room at the same time as her aunt.

He sat watching the blaze, his legs extended, and knocking one foot against the other nervously.

"She doesn't mean that I shall speak at all," he told himself. "Her conduct while I've been here is her answer, and she expects me to understand. To-morrow the sand will be put back in the hour-glass and be sent through the daily routine."

The door was opened softly, and he sprang up, to

THE VAGABOND

see her advancing into the room. She was never more exasperatingly beautiful, he thought. The fire-light played on her hair in quivering gleams; the mole dipped into the dimple in a faint smile of polite determination. Her pose as she stopped before him was that of one forearmed for a set conflict. She had promised to let him propose: now was his time, her manner plainly said. He met her perversity with the same serene cheeriness of demeanor as on the morning he joined her on the drive. Bowing, he placed a chair before the grate. She hesitated, then seated herself. Still he was silent, leaving her to speak first.

"The back-log is going to fall soon, and I came back to see it," she said, finally, with some embarrassment.

"I saw your face in the flame plainly before you came in," he remarked, abstractedly. "It was not then vexed. It was radiant, as it has been in every camp-fire flame for twelve years. When you think of what might be, why not think of the best that might be? And always I have wondered if we should ever truly sit looking into the same fire and reality should have taken the place of fancy——"

"I did not agree that you should tell the story again!" she put in.

"I was not telling it. I need not to tell it." Now he turned, and, looking into her eyes, spoke in tense, quivering sincerity: "You know it! My every glance, my every act has told you. Take all the happiness and all the ambition in the world and make it into a world by itself and it is my love for you."

For an instant her gaze had met his; then she rose.

"It is impossible," she said. "Good-night!" Part

THE VAGABOND

way across the room she turned and added desperately: "Besides, I don't love you—I don't love you!"

"Tell me this! Tell me you believe that story—you believe that I have been honest—honest!"

"I do. And I—I have tried to be kind and chivalrous—only that—only that!"

And she was gone, and he was standing alone in the great room of a hostile house, he realized, when the back-log fell, with a volley of sparks.

XXXVIII

SABRE TO SABRE

At breakfast both were in command of that half-bantering good-humor which was their most feasible common ground. When the moment of parting was at hand, the heartfelt flow of his gratitude to his hosts was unrestrained by formality.

"You saved my life! You have cared for me as only such as you could care for a sick man. Had I been a Confederate and a relative you could not have done more. For haven't you avoided every opinion that might have offended me? Haven't you shown how far above war and politics a woman's kindness is? I can't repay you, except by doing as much for you and yours. But you must know that I am a better and a broader man, and that to you is, I know, the greatest of rewards."

"The very greatest," said Mrs. Bulwer. "Be careful, won't you, there's a dear. Richard and you and so many—" Her voice faltered, as thousands of mothers' voices did in those days. "The strongest and bravest, whether it's to be one nation or two—we need them!"

On her part, Volilla—the last touch of her delicate thoughtfulness—told him that she had had a groom take the kinks out of Breaker's legs in a preliminary

THE VAGABOND

canter, lest his pace be too spirited for a convalescent.

"If, when the war is over, you should ever come this way again," Mrs. Bulwer added, as he mounted, "Richard as well as myself would be glad to see you at our home."

When he had spoken his thanks for this graciousness to a stranger whose introduction had been scarcely regular, he glanced at Volilla. Would she, too, ask him to come again as a friend?

"It's so fortunate! You're going to have perfect autumn weather," she said, hastily. "Good-by, Mr. Williams!"

"Good-by, Miss Lanley. God bless you for your kindness!"

He did not look back after he had spoken; and, patting his horse's neck to keep him down to a walk, he rode away.

"Back to the hour-glass, Breaker!" he was thinking, as he turned into the road. "We'll see the war through if it takes twenty years. And then break the glass let the wind carry the sand whither it will. Father Bob won't be on the trail, and there'll be nobody to give the gold to. I did climb the mountain; I did find the mine, and Tim and Jimmy can have it. I'll find another. I'll keep moving; that's the only thing. Pooh! We aren't babies, are we, Breaker? There'll be plenty of fighting, good fighting, to drive a man's heart back to its place when it seems to choke his throat. And we'll keep our promise, Breaker, about Southbridge. But we won't run away from the plume and the sash, and we won't be murderers, either."

THE VAGABOND

At that moment Southbridge was waiting under the cover of a tree, where he had been curbing his impatience since dawn. No man had ever been more restless for a fair field which would relieve him of self-imposed aspersion. The "when you are well" which he had spoken in the sick-room he had meant to convey as definite an impression as pistols and coffee for two; in fine, that the Vagabond should not return to the Union lines without giving him satisfaction. While the Lanley house sheltered the enemy he would never enter it; but this did not keep him from being informed through a servant's frequent journeyings of the time of the guest's departure. So it happened that he reined his horse fairly across the Vagabond's path within a hundred yards of the Lanley gate.

"I thought so," he said.

"You thought what?" the Vagabond asked, in surprise.

Southbridge had changed his position so that the two rigid figures were facing each other over their horses' ears and neither had the advantage of the other in ground, position, or composure.

"Oh, I'll be exact," he said, contemptuously. "You shall have no complaint on that score. I thought that I should have to come after you if I wanted you to keep your word."

"I did not say that I would seek you. I am not seeking you now," was the Vagabond's reply.

"No-o?" Southbridge hung on to the rising inflection grimly. "No, I judge not. But you have not forgotten my last words. Are you well?"

"Yes."

"Well enough to fight?"

THE VAGABOND

"Yes; if I have a cause."

And then Southbridge in a word supplied one which no soldier could resist.

It was not necessary for the Vagabond to exert himself to be calm, as he had feared he must when he and the flowery cavalier should meet. He had, as yet, for one thing, a trace of the languor of a convalescent. Tragic as the situation was, he found humor in it, and he had no great object to hold him to life just then except the Vagabonds, which Jimmy and Tim could lead as well as he. He was subdued by the contrast, so in keeping with the satire of the time, between the gentle domesticity he had left and the male savagery he had encountered. The spectacle of two men slashing each other with no end but the gratification of personal enmity appealed to the sense of the ridiculous, which is always cooling. Having often longed half-whimsically to have Southbridge on the edge of a precipice, with room for only one, his desire was granted. It was as unnatural for the masculine being to fly in the face of such a challenge as for a woman to desert her child. Yes, death he little minded; the humiliation of being outplayed by this man he did mind tremendously.

"Your weapons—pistols at ten paces or sabres at one?" Southbridge demanded.

"As we are—as cavalry-men should."

"Good! Here's the place! Here and now!" He nodded over his shoulder to a vacant field.

"Sha'n't we be seen from the house?" the Vagabond suggested.

"You chose the weapons. I choose the ground."

The spectacular in Southbridge's nature hoped for

THE VAGABOND

nothing so much as that his lady from her balcony should behold—behold is the fit word—her champion in the lists beat down his adversary.

“As you will!”

For the first time the Vagabond’s face, which had been inscrutable in its calm, broke into an unconscious smile—such a smile as when he had his first glimpse of the Cavalier on the Lanley porch.

It was the spark to Southbridge’s temper. He cried an oath and rode on ahead to the other side of a level as big as a base-ball field; while the Vagabond, his scheme of offence and defence very clear to him now, rode to the middle of it. He laughed softly, as his adversary turned and faced him, at the picture they would make for a cartoonist’s pencil.

The two men on the verge of a combat for which every cavalry-man is trained and which seldom occurs—but when it does is to a charge what the turret is to architecture—barring a common chivalrous quality, were as different as nature could make them. Southbridge was over six feet in height. He was in his full array of knotted silk sash, Spanish spurs, tasselled boots, and plumed hat. His horse, a hundred pounds or more lighter than his opponent’s, was pure white—the only one in the Virginia Firsts. “Then my men will know where I am and so will the enemy, please God,” its owner said.

The Vagabond was the thicker set. At an angle on his reddish hair sat lightly the jaunty fatigue-cap of the day, and otherwise his uniform was unornamental and regulation. Of the two, for the size of his frame he had much more closely knitted muscles before illness had softened them; and, again, his

THE VAGABOND

bones would not so much hamper mobility. In every other respect, including his horse, when agility alone was demanded in a mount, he was at a disadvantage. He had not been drilled in the cavalry exercises at West Point. The little sabre practice that he knew had been gained in four months' training. Yet, as he sat on Breaker in the middle of that field, he felt like granite.

"The other side! That's your privilege. As much start as you please," Southbridge called.

"Oh, thank you, I am content."

The even tones added fuel to the flame of Southbridge's anger.

"Are you ready?" he sang out, fiercely.

"Yes, even waiting."

The Confederate's sabre was drawn from its scabbard in a flash; it was circled around his head in exultation as his horse sprang forward. He counted upon a slashing blow, reinforced by the momentum of his flight, to end the fray. The other had patted Breaker's flank in a way that Breaker understood, and steed and man seemed a part of the landscape. An onlooker might have thought them stricken with paralysis by the fear of their adversary and hopelessly awaiting Nemesis to overtake them, or nothing more than a dummy that a mad trooper had set up for a target.

The Vagabond had unsheathed his sabre, but he cut no dashes with it. He held it firmly, almost on a level with Breaker's ears, and while Southbridge's lips were parted and his eyes glazed by feverish pre-occupation, his own were calmly smiling. Human nature not beside itself, not trained, would have

THE VAGABOND

swung back to let that wild animal and wild man pass, out of the sheer instinct that makes a baby blink. When the enemy was near, so near that he had already risen in his stirrups to strike, the Vagabond leaned over to the side by which he was to pass and shot his sabre fairly toward the forehead of the flying horse. The horse reared to escape the glint of steel, thereby putting the target beyond his rider's range and making his rider's blow an inconsequent hissing through the air.

As Southbridge came to a stand-still thirty or forty yards away and turned around, the Vagabond was again facing him.

"You ride well!" the Yankee called, now feeling somewhat weak.

"I thought you wanted to fight!" was the answer.

His restless horse prancing, he began moving in a circle, with the Vagabond for its centre.

"Not at all," the Vagabond said, cheerfully. "Not I, but you. I only want to be accommodating."

That was too much. Southbridge drove his spurs into flanks already bleeding. This time his sabre was not uplifted. It was drawn back ready to thrust into any opening that offered. The Vagabond now sat erect in guard. With the thunderous approach of his enemy Breaker swerved a little, else gray knee would have locked with blue knee. Southbridge, so recklessly contemptuous of any skill on the part of his adversary that he had not his wrist through the cord, lunged, and the Vagabond, with a swing upward, struck the weapon near the hilt and sent it flying into the air.

It caught the sun in shivering gleams, and seemed

THE VAGABOND

certain to fall near enough for him to reach it first—and then, with the dexterity and quickness of a hand-ball player, Southbridge caught it by the hilt as it fell. The Vagabond could not withhold his admiration.

“Bravo!” he called.

The humiliation of being disarmed by a tyro was spur enough, without the thought that Volilla might have seen all from her window, to drive Southbridge to desperation. He craved the blood of that figure which now touched its cap in polite salute, and he determined to charge and recharge till the suspense was over.

Breaker had been extremely patient for a veteran. He did not reason elaborately, as the talking horses of fiction do. Aside from any effort between his rider and the other man, the fight had now become personal with him. That namby-pamby white horse, with his long mane and tail and airs to go with them, had snorted by him once, and a second time had kicked dust in his eyes. An ancestry which roamed the earth in hordes and fought for chiefship of the drove would not permit him to stand by for a third insult. His curving neck and pounding forefoot expressed as much to his master, who let him go; and when once more the combatants could see the whites of each other's eyes, the two-footed gave the four-footed comrade a signal that meant “Close in.”

Now the bay's superior weight and his reserve energy counted. The horses' shoulders came together at the same instant that steel ground on steel, till hilt met hilt, and, with the impetus of Breaker's attack, men and beasts went down to the dry turf

THE VAGABOND

together. In that interval, when two determined, straining faces were close to each other, the Vagabond dropped his own weapon, seized Southbridge's sabre wrist, weakened the grasp, and, falling atop his combatant, was the first to rise, with the captured blade in his hand.

"Is that fair? If not, we can begin over again."

"It is," said Southbridge, rising as if his body was weighted with a heart of lead.

The Vagabond picked up his plumed hat and handed it to him. Southbridge flung it onto his head.

"*It is!*" he repeated, "for we fought as cavalry do." He paused, while he regarded his enemy stoically. "You are a clever soldier!" he said, slowly, admiringly, bitterly.

The Vagabond offered his hand. Southbridge refused it with a glare, and remounting rode away, not by the road but by a lane running far to the rear of the house.

"Now I am back in the nineteenth century again," the victor thought. "But you weren't a remnant. You were a magnificent specimen."

He watched the stalwart figure of his enemy until it disappeared from view. Then he suddenly felt himself so weak that he had to lean on the shoulder of Breaker, which he patted lovingly, for support. All his strength had gone into the strain of smiling in the fight for life. While he rested thus, weak enough to have been overcome by a boy in knickerbockers, he heard a footstep, and looked up to see Volilla at his side with a flask in her hand.

"You must need a little brandy after such an effort."

THE VAGABOND

"Did you see it—the fight?" he asked.

"Yes," she replied, as disinterestedly as ever in her kindness, unscrewing the top of the flask and handing it to him.

He tilted and tilted it till he felt the few remaining drops on his tongue.

"Oh, it was nearly empty, wasn't it!" she exclaimed. "I seized it in a hurry, not thinking. If you'll wait I'll bring some more. Besides, it was unpardonably thoughtless of us to let you go away with an empty canteen." She unfastened it from the rings on his saddle-tree without asking his yes or no. "I'll fill it," and she was starting back.

"It is unnecessary, believe me! I can dip it in the first stream."

"And get the fever! You'll wait for it, won't you?" she asked; and because that mole was dipping into the dimple as she asked, he perforce consented—like the fool he was, he told himself—to further torture.

"Thank you!" she said. "One of our officers fought you when you were ill, and it's only fair that someone should recognize the fact."

He wished heartily that she had not come to pay another of her self-imposed obligations. Her kindness had become a two-edged sword. He wanted no more stoical leave-takings, he thought, as he dropped to the turf and began paying compliments to the triumphant Breaker, who still faced in the direction by which that namby-pamby white horse had left the field.

When she returned she was on Folly's back. Her hand trembled as she passed him the canteen. He

THE VAGABOND

fastened it on the saddle and mounted. Then, turning toward her and lifting his cap for farewell—a farewell in terrible earnest—he saw on her face that far-away expression of the day of her grandfather's death.

"I'll ride with you a little way," she said, in a kind of indecision, "to make sure that you get on safely."

"I had not expected so much," he said, not very pleasantly. "You are a most devoted nurse."

She rode on beside him in silence long after they had reached the road.

"I'm sorry that—difference took place at your very door," he observed, finally. "But we men are impulsive brutes."

To this she said nothing for some time, and then her remark, made angrily, did not seem in reference to his, but rather a part of a tempestuous train of thought.

"I could not prevent it. Fight you would. Fight you did. I knew you would make him blind with rage. Oh, if I'd been a man! If I had been against you I would have smiled back at you and met your cold blood with blood as cold and steel as cold!"

So Southbridge's humiliation was hers, he thought; and he said, looking straight ahead:

"He was uninjured. I kept my promise."

Again there was silence, except for gusts of wind twittering in the tree-tops and the measured cluck of their horses' hoofs in the dust. Heavy minute on heavy minute they rode, while he, glancing now and then out of the tail of his eye at her, saw her beauti-

THE VAGABOND

ful in the outraged pride of her cause and never once lifting her far-away gaze from the road.

"Yes. You took his sabre away—you, a sick Yankee—as if it were a boy's, made of tin—took it away from a colonel of Virginia cavalry!" she said, slowly, as much to herself as to him. "And he fought you when you were ill!"

"No. He asked me if I were well enough. I said that I was. The outcome is no great discredit to him and certainly no credit to me," he replied, desperately. "I never did care for tricking policemen except as a means of escape. I wanted a mine, a mountain, and a——"

"Don't!" she interposed, sharply. "You make light of your victory over a West Pointer, a Virginian, a colonel of cavalry, as if you did such things every day."

"No; to show how little it counts. He may be a much better soldier than I. The war is not settled in personal contests."

"But you won—you won!" she repeated. "You always win—that's what is horrible in you."

"Not always—not in the greatest thing of all! Oh, I wish you would go!" he exclaimed, almost vehemently. "Can't you see that you are breaking my heart?"

She made no reply. She did not even look up. They kept on a quarter of a mile farther, while she worked the reins in her fingers nervously, her lip quivering. Finally, she allowed her horse to fall behind and to stop altogether, as he did his a few paces beyond her. And she was smiling, he saw, as only she could smile; and the sunlight itself, playing

THE VAGABOND

on her adorable hair, seemed to have caught her change of mood.

"I don't want to break your heart, and I don't want you to win," she said, and touched the whip to Folly.

He watched her till she was out of sight around a bend, then said:

"It's a lonely road now. Come, Breaker!"

XXXIX

UNCERTAINTY

His life had been one of Yes and No, his associates rugged, outspoken men. Feminine subtlety was a domain which he had explored only enough to prepare him for new wonders. While Breaker carried him slowly, his brain travelled swiftly in new fields. Recollection of Felicia's contemptuous scorn on the battle-field in contrast with her charming surrender at a cot-side became illuminating. With the transformation of one who sees theory proved in practice, he understood how a woman could refuse, expecting refusal to be taken for consent. Weak to the point of lightheadedness from the reaction of his effort against Southbridge, he was in a state to make a conjecture an illusion. The vehement "I don't love you," of the previous night, became "I do." Her coming to him after the fight, her ride at his side, were no longer inexplicable. Her smile, the cheer of her voice at their parting, bore to the faint Vagabond an unmistakable message. In action she had confessed superbly what her tongue could not.

With this transformation, the dust-covered stalks of the dying weeds by the roadside became as beautiful as orchids. His reins hung limp; his eyes were almost closed, and his lips were parted in the deli-

THE VAGABOND

cious fever of love's triumph. Of what moment was it to him that there was an army to the North and an army to the South? Of what moment were taps and reveille? Why shouldn't he journey leisurely when ahead he saw neither fences nor trees nor sky, but his heart's desire, smiling as she was in his last glimpse of her—smiling in a woman's consent, he believed. He heard the purling of a mountain-stream; the hum of his machinery taking out the wealth of the mine that he had found for her; and he transferred his vision to a California landscape; he set her in a house of his building, and rode in her company over their lands, with Folly's ears in line with Breaker's.

"I'll make myself worthy! I'll make myself worthy, Breaker!" he said.

All too soon he heard the call of a picket, which made him drop his reverie as if the man in blue were an eavesdropper. As quickly it came back again, and he was seeing, not soldiers, not a camp, but her face as he went, as military etiquette required, to report to his superior before going to his company. The General's warm congratulations, which otherwise would have thrilled him to the finger-tips, were only a drop into the full cup of his happiness, and the heartiness of the recipient's thanks was the expression of his feeling toward the Creator for making the world so fair, rather than toward the General specifically. This time he was not a man under charges with military formality pressing down his indignation, but a guest occupying a chair with a beaming instead of a scowling authority opposite. When they had talked for some time, the General brought out

THE VAGABOND

that famous bottle, and then, with a teasing glance, asked:

"Did you get the girl?"

"I have hopes, sir, and you a secret to keep, sir."

"Good! Precisely, my boy," came the congratulation and the answer to the hint.

The General seemed in no hurry to part with him. He made talk till they heard the tramp of hoofs (which was the fruition of a plan on which he had speeded an orderly), when he drew aside the flap of the tent and the Vagabond looked out upon his Vagabonds two deep, with their sabres so many upright gleams beside their bronzed faces in greeting of their leader.

"The manner of your return is some reparation for the manner of your departure," the General responded. "You may well be proud of them. When Southbridge chased them right into our lines they swore, they were fairly insubordinate—bless 'em!—because I wouldn't let them return to attack the whole Confederate army to get you back—for I supposed, of course, that you were a prisoner."

The Vagabond longed to go to each stalwart, loyal fellow and clap him on the shoulder in harmony of spirit, in memory of the work they had done and in promise of the work they were yet to do together. The instant his leg was over the saddle, Breaker flew to the leader's place as he would to a waiting stall with a full bin.

"Think of that, you slim piece of impertinence, Jimmy Pool!" said Tim Booker, after they were dismounted and lounging in the leader's tent. "Think of a man that had a hole clean through his body look-

THE VAGABOND

ing as cocky as if he had never been flat on his back with the doctor pulling on his gloves and the undertaker at the door!"

"Hat and boots, I'm glad to see you back," drawled Jimmy.

"Why do you put in the hat and boots?" Tim inquired. "You may run short of words some day and repent the waste."

"Humph!" ejaculated Jimmy.

"More waste!" chuckled Tim. "It's ruinous."

"You look here, Timothy"—Jimmy was almost angry—"I want you to know that I think just as much of the Vagabond as you do, and I've worried just as much about him as you have."

"Yes, you think it," Tim threw back his head and let out such a laugh as had fascinated the Vagabond in the corn-rows, "and I say it for both. Why, if you talked as much as I did I'd have nobody to listen to me—I wouldn't like you at all, Jimmy Pool; that's a fact."

"And if you turned as silent as I, Tim, I'd be as lonesome as a man who's moved away from the roar of Niagara Falls."

"And what is the news?" the Vagabond asked.

"McClellan rides around the army every day to make sure that none of his lambs have strayed away where the naughty, horrid Johnny Rebs might hurt 'em. He always looks just as comfortable and knowing as the cat that swallowed the canary. But he hasn't swallowed the canary. He wouldn't be guilty of shedding blood. If a mosquito bit him he'd throw up breastworks. He's terribly worried because he hasn't more men. He'd like every able-bodied man

THE VAGABOND

in the country in his camp, where they'd be safe—so many are killed by accident at home. 'My brave, handsome boys, hang your clothes on a hickory-limb, but don't go near the water, and drill a little more, and look out not to get corns on your feet, there's a set of dears, to please your General,' he says, and rides back to Washington. He says it so prettily, and he's such a peaceable little man, that you can't help liking him. He can make a beautiful cake, yes, sir, and he's so taken up with making curlycues on the frosting that he's afraid to bake it. He'll stand before the stove, saying, 'Shall I or sha'n't I? Is it time, or isn't it? She loves me, she loves me not,' till the oven's cold; and then he'll conclude that a chocolate cake'd been better, anyway, and start over again. His friends still compare the things he's going to do with the things Napoleon did. As you say, Billy, have a good look at a thing before you get scared about it; but the General shuts his eyes and calls for reinforcements. If he had a million men he'd take it for granted that the Johnnies had a million and a half. Oh, I never expect to see the eternal hills of California again. I'm going to stay in the army and die of old age."

"Criticising superiors," said Jimmy.

"You think it: I say it," Tim rejoined. "And the company?" the Vagabond asked. "The company?"

Tim was most soberly exact in details one moment and quite the contrary the next (when his eyes twinkled) in a long recital, which was eventually interrupted by the arrival of Mrs. Williams and the Colonel, whose regiment was now in camp. Felicia did not wait for her nephew to make the overtures

THE VAGABOND

this time; she threw her arms around his neck and kissed him fondly.

"What a handsome pair you make!" the Vagabond said. "I'm proud of you. That's better, uncle, that eagle. That's what you ought to have on your shoulder."

"Don't talk about us!" cried Felicia. "Talk about yourself! To think that you should have been lying at the point of death and I shouldn't have the privilege of nursing you! It seems as if I'd never done anything for you from the first—when you wouldn't live with me. Oh, it wasn't because I didn't try. I dropped everything and hastened to Arlington the minute I heard of it. General Husted wouldn't listen to my going. I went to the President and thought I'd get a permit over the General's head. Do you know that Abraham Lincoln has more than a backbone? He can be real contrary.

"‘We need you here,’ he said, in that soft, honest way of his, without putting it on thick, as most politicians do, so it doesn't count with anybody that can see through a sieve. ‘Maybe those two ladies wouldn't be quite so hospitable if they had two Federals in their house, and one of them neither sick nor wounded and come without an invitation.’

"He does have a wonderful way, that big man of yours, Billy, of calming you down with a word or leaving you with nothing to do but sputter. And sputter I did and came away. And sputter I have, and waited for you and worried about you. Now that you are back, I'm perfectly happy. And here I am, telling you to talk about yourself"—Felicia had gained much vivacity, charm, and youthfulness of

THE VAGABOND

late—"and then talking about myself, without giving you a chance to say a word. Were those two ladies very kind to you?"

"Very."

"Had they lots of slaves?"

"Very many."

"And were they kind to them?"

"Very."

"Soldiering does make men so monosyllabic!"

She was not disappointed to hear that the slaves were well treated; no—but when one goes to war for a great principle, one likes to have facts support it.

"They are kind because they are kind people. It all depends on who the slaves' master is."

"And that is the worst of the system," she retorted. "It palliates—it obscures!"

"Er-er," observed the Judge, who was too happy these days to care for arguments. "Was the young woman pretty?"

Pretty? The Vagabond had never thought of Volilla in that light. Pretty? The word was too small for her.

"Fine-looking, yes," he said.

"Ha! So?" The Judge nudged his wife. "You know what happened to my nurse and myself, eh? Oh, it's my turn to badger you now, Billy!"

"Your nurse was a Federal," the Vagabond replied.

"Good!" said Felicia. "I like to hear you say that."

The Judge had no idea how near he had come to the quick. Since Father Bob's death, the secret was shared only with that iron-bound, double-locked re-

THE VAGABOND

pository, the General. When the Colonel and Mrs. Williams had gone, the Vagabond sank back on his cot and fell into the delicious sleep of extreme physical fatigue and of the hazy consciousness of sudden great happiness yet to be fully understood and appreciated. Awakening shortly after dusk, with strength refreshed and mind clear, every event of the previous day ranged itself in sharp outline in seemingly normal relation to the others. How could he have so befooled himself in making a wish the father to a thought! Another woman's refusal might mean acceptance, but not hers, not hers. Yet why had she ridden so far with him? Because of her anger with him for whipping Southbridge? To see him safely off her estate, perhaps. Why should she have come to him after the fight at all? Instead, why shouldn't she have gone to Southbridge with sympathy for his misfortune? Ah, that was easily explained in the light of his ideals of her. She had seen her champion attack a sick man, whose health had been in her keeping, and she went not to the one who rode away but to the one who was too weak to leave the field. She had blamed herself for thoughtlessness and gone to fill the canteen, and, not finding it in her heart to ask him back to the house, she had escorted him at the same time that she could not resist expressing her indignation because he had won—always won.

Pity! A proud nature groping for an explanation comes slowly to that. His love for her had led to his wound; to the charge against him; to the fight with Southbridge. She would not be like herself, like what he wished her to be, unless

THE VAGABOND

she felt some responsibility and a desire to save him from the consequences of his sentimental folly. Pity and a sense of self-blame had sent her to the Union lines for a doctor, saved him from being made a Confederate prisoner, and nursed him without prejudice. Pity and self-blame and enmity, pulling her this way and that, accounted for all. They spoke when she said, "I don't want you to win, and I don't want to break your heart." Yet his last glimpse of her, with the inexplicable force of inborn superstition outweighing reason, crowding into his thoughts unbidden, scorned his logic. A glance can carry a heart's message as quickly and as truly as a diamond flashes out of the darkness. Could a diamond of such lustre be made of paste? Could that smile stand for only a kindly farewell to a guest? He did not think so; he did not dare, in face of his fears, to think otherwise.

Your man of Yes and No cannot stand long between the fires of doubt; he is bound to charge one way or the other. Why had he not spoken again while she rode with him that morning? Had she wished it? Had she expected it? He would pour out his love again; he would force his speech with the abandon that his heart commanded and her diffidence might demand ere she consented. This time he sought the General's permission for his journey. The General b-r-red and drummed. As he promised not to ask again, yes—"on a scout, of course."

"When a man loves a woman wholly and cleanly and mightily," he thought the next morning, as he followed the road that had no turnings for him, "it is the greatest thing of his life—a thing so frail that

THE VAGABOND

it is like a bubble, so solid and gleaming that it is like gold. Then the world's business must wait, then his heart must be master. Climbing mountains and finding mines and leading charges are only joyful sacrifices on that altar. If you would be strong, it is for her admiration. You do not mind whether the crowd speaks in cheers or hisses so their echo is praise from her lips."

His arrival was timed to her morning ride, which was later now that the weather was cool; and he had been waiting under the trees for some time when Folly was brought to the curb. As Volilla appeared in the doorway he pledged himself again, as he had in each passing moment, not to be tongue-tied by a no! His gentleness that hitherto had kept him from even the semblance of persecuting her with his love was submerged in the feverish mingling of hopes and fears. In the serene cheerfulness that had won him the privilege of telling his story, he rode forward to meet her on the drive. Her start of surprise this time had the edge of defiance. He had thought of the smile of her parting until he fancied that as he had left her so he should find her, thus to begin his courtship again. Even her adorable hair seemed a part of a statue's cold outline; not a single strand was free. All self-possession and composure, she stared at him as if he were an offender without the pale of excuse. He was speechless.

"Unless professionally, with their troops, I advise Union officers not to pay any calls till the war is over. Come, Folly!"

"Magnificent!" he thought, as she rode away. "I—I didn't mean to play the brute or ingrate," were

THE VAGABOND

his first words, spoken in a half-whisper and unheard by her. After she had passed out of sight, riding southward, he still looked at the space between the trees where he had last seen her. When finally, and it seemed to require all his strength to draw the rein, he turned Breaker's head, he caught sight of Marcus Aurelius coming toward him. Marcus had not observed mankind at home and abroad to no avail. He understood the situation.

"I hope yo'se bettah, sah," he managed to say.

"Yes, quite well, and I want to leave a note for Miss Lanley."

The idea had come to him as he spoke; and he took out his little sketch-book. On the other side of a sheet which had a picture of Folly which he had made during his convalescence he wrote:

"I shall love you for all time. I shall hope. I shall wait. I shall come when the war is over."

Passing out of the yard, he saw Volilla in the distance in the lane where his story had been told, and he saw Southbridge coming across the fields to join her.

PART III

XL

THE LONG WAIT

After all, there are only two philosophies: Stoop-shouldered pessimism and erect, sky-gazing optimism. If pessimism has an illusion, prompt reaction makes it ashamed of a fall from grace; if trouble assaults optimism, for the sake of self-encouragement it adds another story to castles in the air. Pessimism, when it does not run away, can only hold on to what it possesses. Optimism will charge and charge again till it wins the goal, or, failing it, finds joy in its scars, and cheers on others who enter the lists. In its grandest moments it can call death a sweet sleep. And the Vagabond, before he had reached the Union lines on his return from Lanleyton, had fallen back on his boyish reasoning that a thing would never come true unless you believed "hard" that it would.

In all the days dragging into months and in all the months dragging by slow accumulation into years until March of '65, no one except himself knew what he carried in his heart; how it had given zest to his blows, because he tried to find strength in the

THE VAGABOND

smile of one farewell rather than weakness in the scorn of another.

Hope ran high with each new experiment in generals and each new campaign, to end in waiting again after all the might of the North had thrown itself against the Confederacy in vain. The war had become an institution. Hundreds of thousands of citizens had become a great organization, with a regular's training and volunteers' hearts, beating time to the tune of death, and embalming-shops were as thick in the streets of Washington as booths at a fair. In the North, skirmishes were a matter-of-fact subject of comment, like the market prices; great battles brought grief to hearts of relatives and friends of the dead and relief to relatives of the living, and business went on again and the national debt grew and Lincolnian politics smote coppery heads when they arose; while in the South, man, woman, and child felt in every daily association the paucity of food and clothes without thought of suing for peace.

On the Fredericksburg campaign the Vagabond had again ridden along the road which held his most cherished memories. When he came to the knoll from which he had expected to see the white cupola he saw instead a column of smoke. Though they pressed forward with all haste, the troop did not arrive until the roof of Lanleyton had fallen; but they had the satisfaction of capturing the incendiary. For a moment the men thought that their leader would strangle him where he stood.

"Take charge of the prisoner and keep him with us, Jimmy," was the instruction, finally.

THE VAGABOND

Three days later, the Vagabonds, dismounted, lay hugging the fragment of a stone wall; bullets dipping from the heights whistled over their heads and tossed up the dust at their feet, which were drawn close to their bodies; charges of canister struck their scant breastworks with a crash or passed over with the roar of a hurricane through a frozen rigging; and the level of the continual musketry fire was broken by the explosion of shells as the noise of city traffic is broken by the clangor of an ambulance's gong. With the missiles of death as thick in the rear as in front, the troops must wait for darkness before they could leave the scene of a battle already lost.

Jimmy Pool had obeyed commands with a literalness that had not been authorized. His cold gray eyes and his thin-lipped mouth had become a haunting vision to the prisoner. At his side as he knelt back of the line was a cringing, shivering thing in human form who alternately put his hand to his eyes to hide the sight of blood and to his ears to keep out the terrible sounds. If he tried to seek the protection of Jimmy's body, Jimmy moved to one side; if he tried to crawl among the men, Jimmy pulled him back to the same position of danger as himself.

"It is a beautiful day, elsewhere," remarked Jimmy.

The charge of a shrapnel bursting near blew the sulphurous smoke into their nostrils.

"I can't—I can't stay here," Aikens gasped. He started tremblingly to rise, as if he would run.

"I wouldn't undertake to retreat now, myself. It is jumping off the precipice—sure death."

"And death to stay—death—death! Why did I

THE VAGABOND

burn that house? Why did I forge that note? It's the devil born in me—envy of power and love of money. I can see that girl, Belle—I can see Mr. Lanley and I can see her, Miss Lanley, when he was going to shoot me—I can hear her say: 'Don't do murder! Don't! He's not worth it!'—and I hated her for that—and I was doing well in the North—I was quite a hero, there—and I had plans—but when a man faced me down I could not forget him, and I had to strike back in my way. Oh, Lieutenant, don't look at me with those terrible eyes of yours!"

"Jimmy, I am afraid you are going too far," said the Vagabond. "Come, Aikens, there's poor Edson. We will lift him to one side and you take his rifle. If you use it half as well as he did, I will forgive you. Come, once you are firing, you won't feel it so much!"

"I—I—I couldn't!" Aikens gasped. One had only to look at his livid face to understand that he spoke the truth.

"Then take his intrenching tool and dig yourself a hole. That will protect you."

"Oh—thank you—I—" He made an effort to reach the spade, which hung in the dead man's belt, but hugged the earth again when a bullet passed near him. "I—I—can't!"

"Then I'll dig it for you," said the Vagabond, and started to do so. "I can't bear to see anyone suffering as you are. The fear is inborn. I know you cannot help it."

"By trying to avoid death you are calling it," Jimmy observed.

There was a moment's deceitful lull in the firing,

THE VAGABOND

significant of a heavier fusillade to come. Looking behind him, Aikens, for the first time, saw not a single one of the little fountains of dust which the bullets threw up in seeming vexation at having missed their marks. A wild impulse and a wilder hope suddenly gave his limbs strength, and he ran. Before he had gone ten yards he fell with a wound in the leg.

"He mustn't stay there!" the Vagabond cried, and not only he but Jimmy Pool sprang toward him. They had scarcely started when a shell burst fairly over his head, and the life and the blood went out of his body like the water out of a squeezed sponge.

Returning from that field of needless butchery, which never disturbed the nerves of a fat-witted commander, in sight of the ashes of Lanleyton, wet by the rains which the thunders of battle had drawn, the Vagabond wondered if its mistress could ever love a man who had worn the Blue. "I shall hope! I shall wait!" Then, as he rested under the trees, picturing just how the old place had looked, he suddenly passed into the fever of an inspiration.

So long engaged in destruction, at last he was to do something more to his taste—he was to build. Seizing the first opportunity for leave, he consulted architects and contractors, and instead of the promotion which again had been offered him, he secured official complicity and even a guard for his project as soon as the final campaign of the war was begun and Lanleyton was a point safely in Federal territory and lying well out of the army's track. He had an ally in the wife of one of the new brigadiers. Here was work in keeping with Felicia's part, which, in her

THE VAGABOND

own words, was to "help." Of Volilla he had heard only what the questioning of prisoners could glean. She was still alive, sometimes in Lynchburg, sometimes in Richmond, nursing the sick, encouraging the strong.

When Grant and Sheridan came out of his West—out of his land of great plains, great mountains, and great rivers—he was thankful for his own as well as for his country's sake. "On this line all summer!" What solace that to a weary President and that weary land that had supported him in loyal expenditure of lives and funds and had seen their forces sweep back and forth like the changing of the tides. Grant would attack and attack and attack and not fall back—and *not fall back!* For the first time that magnificent soldiery had a leader worthy of it, who made a battering-ram of its courage instead of a theatrical display. At last the thinking privates, with whom initiative was inborn, knew that for every death there would be a gain that would not be forfeited. From that day, as he tells us in his memoirs, when as a colonel of volunteers the square-jawed man, with many misgivings, had ridden over a hill to attack a Confederate regiment and found that the regiment had gone, he concluded to leave the worrying to the other side; to go ahead when in doubt. If his men were tired or untrained, so were the enemy's; and the turning-point of fortune would be the aggressor's. Such his simple characteristic, which no rumors, no temporary disaster, no advice could change; such the sum of the great man's virtue.

Sheridan brought to an army three years under arms the new reasoning that if men on horseback

THE VAGABOND

were to fight on foot with infantry, why have mounted men at all? Thenceforth, the cavalry was not to lie in intrenchments or to patrol the rear, not to get scared before it had a good look at a thing, but to court danger as if danger were its sweetheart. It was no park saddle work, that under the little Irishman who strung dead men and dead horses about the State of Virginia to end the war instead of allowing them to die in camp to prolong it.

The Vagabonds had played their part heroically, whether at the Yellow Tavern, when the Northern cavalry cleared its escutcheon of Stuart's rebukes, or in the exacting vigils of the scout. They had ridden in all weathers, ridden until they were so many nodding automatons napping in their saddles; until their muscles were as stiff as sole leather; and they had been happy in their hardships, as all true soldiers are when they are gaining ground and not treading air. Of the hundred who started gayly from Belmore, thirty were left; while kind fortune had preserved their three leaders to lend their personal example to consummate skill and spirit of corps. The Vagabond had still another scar; Tim Booker had four; and wiry Jimmy Pool had lost buttons and had his hair singed without having his flesh touched beyond that white welt across his cheek which a Confederate sabre had dealt at the cost of its owner's life.

"You've been hit often enough, little Boy Blue," said Tim. "If you'll get a microscope and look yourself over you'll find you're like a pepper-box cover. Yes, you've been shot through and through with solid shot, shrapnel and canister; but you're so thin you never noticed it."

THE VAGABOND

If there was an ounce of surplus tissue in the troop it had no outward semblance. Your pink-skinned athletes, too, had gone to the wall along with the feather-bed boys, the men of gristle, rubber, and endurance surviving, even as the mustang outwears the sleek carriage-horse. Timothy's own bunching muscles of California days had given way to hardened sinews. Having in that hopefully beginning, disastrously ending, Peninsula campaign refused to trim his beard until the Union army was in Richmond, it had reached downward until it was in danger of being entangled with his horse's mane. But Tim was steadfast; he would not break his word. On the famous ride around the Confederate army, which brought them in sight of the enemy's capital, after his whiskers got caught in a branch of a tree he went to Jimmy with a pair of scissors and said:

"If you'll just do a man's duty to man while I sleep, I guess I'll count this as good as entering Richmond."

Jimmy complying most literally, Tim protested that he did not mean so much; and Jimmy drawled:

"You're asleep, Timothy; mind your conscience," and clipped his friend to the flesh.

In the morning, for want of a mirror, Tim could not tell how he looked, only how he felt; and he felt much ashamed of Jimmy and like a sheep after the spring shearing, he said.

Good-nature was never lacking in that band. Its captain's smile was better than drums or battle-flags. He had the proper spirit, to begin with, even had he not taken a note out of Father Bob's book, in which it was written that uphill was easier for simply call-

THE VAGABOND

ing it downhill. The rain washed off the dust, and the broiling sun kept the road dry; the mud was always as deep on the Confederate side as on the Union. When they had to eat their bacon raw, he reminded his brave fellows that it wasn't any harder on the pig; when they rested their weary bones on the damp earth, he reminded them that the infantry didn't even have saddles for pillows. However downhearted they were, he could stretch lengthening faces laterally as he rode along the line with a familiar toss of his head and a word of cheer.

The organization was not so much a company as a family, such was the superior quality of the men themselves, such their affection for their commander, who made discipline easy, though sharp, because it was uniform. His distinction as a troop-leader had given him many opportunities, which, if they were not as good as climbing mountains, were after his own heart, and made him more valuable in his chosen field of scout and ready unit of small numbers than if he had been a general. His greatest drawback in the eyes of his superiors was a tendency to take risks too lightly; for at times he would forget all else except the relaxation from weary monotony and his heart's burden which the preoccupation of danger brought. But this had its advantage. They had grown so accustomed to his successes, which he always contemptuously called "tricking policemen," that they trusted to his genius to accomplish things that but for him would not have been undertaken.

"If you keep him idle too long," General Husted told General Sheridan, "you may find him gone to New Orleans on his own account. He feeds on dif-

THE VAGABOND

ficulties. Only, for his sake and mine, don't let him have too many delicacies of that kind."

So it was that we find him one of the scouting points of Sheridan's column on the return from the back-breaking and glorious campaign in the Shenandoah and advancing in the direction of Lynchburg. Mud-splashed, gaunt, in the teeth of a March wind, he rode well ahead of his command over the mire called a pike, on the back of the faithful Breaker, who, at the mature age of seven, was the hardiest veteran of them all. At a turn in the road he saw a horse standing in the street opposite one of the four or five buildings responsible for the dot on the map called a C. H. There was something familiar about him, and the man that held him seemed to be one that he had seen. He was little nearer, he had in no way defined the association, when a woman came out of the door with a lightness and a facility and haste evident even at a distance and sprang into the saddle, her steed, with a perfect understanding of her desire, starting at the gallop instantly he felt her in place, the whole making a picture of action and grace sufficient to have made the weariest of cavalry-men raise his eyebrows in admiration. Once her figure was clear against the dun color of the road and earth, its haunting familiarity took the form of that one which had outdistanced him in the race after his story was told. The blood sang in his temples. He forgot his promise to himself not to see her again till the war was over, and put Breaker to the run.

XLI

A SERVANT OF THE LANLEYS

But he drew rein before he had gone a dozen rods. His experience of Folly's superior speed might well have changed his mind, if the fact that he was a responsible person with a definite mission to perform had not. There could have been no keener expression of the satire of civil war than the nature of this one glimpse in three years of the girl he loved. Why was she here? Where was she going? The deserted square, with no living figure now in sight, was the only reply; and he looked away from it at his horse's ears absently, until he was reminded that he was the eyes of the army, and glancing up saw the black face of Marcus Aurelius in the doorway from which Volilla had mounted her horse. As he approached, Marcus—a ragged, hatless Marcus, who could not lose his grand manner—putting his finger to his white locks in a salute of equivocal recognition and screwing his face into a contortion of pride and sarcasm, mumbled:

“Ef yo’ come t’ call on Missy Vo yo’s late. She done gone on.”

The Vagabond's desire to explore the old servant's memory for every fugitive fact about his mistress became all-compelling. Calling to his command to proceed and he would overtake them, he fairly,

THE VAGABOND

pushed Marcus into the deserted house, closing the door behind them.

"Now tell me! Tell me where has Miss Lanley been all this time and what has she been doing?"

"Yo' mus' t'ink I'se got a long tongue an' a week o' time," the old man replied. Assuming the air of a stranger, he went on: "I don' know what bizness my missis's is ob any Yankee sowger."

"I'm not *any* Yankee soldier! Don't try to put on airs with me, Marcus! Have you forgotten the sick man you helped up the stairs on a cloud just as easy? Have you forgotten——"

"'Fo' de Lawd! I nuver, nuver forgit de mos'es' scrumptious Yankee I uver see. No, seh! 'Pears like I forgit nuttin' when I ought t' forgit ev'yt'ing. When I t'inks what I'se been th'oo, me a gent'man's sarvent, me a Lanley, seh, wid my white hyars, I sez, 'Marcus, yo' jes' go lay down an' die an' be quick 'bout it. Yo'se over-lived yo' time by fo' years, yo' ole fool, an' do' know nuff to know yo' oughter be dead.' Me! Me mekin' all dis talk 'bout my good-fur-nuttin' se'f, seh! It ain' me, seh, it's Missy Vo. When I t'ink o' what she been th'oo, I 'clar t' yo', seh, I done b'lieve dat a Yankee done push Marse Lawd off de golden throne, an' he's runnin' t'ings t' suit hisse'f.

"Maybe yo' t'ink yo' know Missy Vo. Marse Richard he know her; he al'ays know her. He say dyah's some'n' 'way down deep in Missy Vo dat jes' mout come t' de top an' mout nuver. Yo' know Marse Richard he's one o' dem talkin' men dat's a t'inkin' man, too. 'Fo' de house bu'n down, Missy Vo wuz al'ays tellin' how de front warn' no place

THE VAGABOND

fur a 'ooman. No, seh, she sez, a 'ooman bettah stay home an' ten' de blacks plantin' an' hoein' an' harvestin' an' jes' be cheerful to give de men hyart. No trousahs fur her; no, seh! But yo' nuver knows what yo'll do tell de house tek a fire. Dem dat sez dey'll be cooles' frows de mirrors out o' de window an' kyars a pillow downstairs; an' dem dat wuz onsahtain—seems ez ef dey could smell whar de oldes' silvah an' pictures wuz, an' dey's jes' ez cahm ez a cup o' tea. When we wuz 'way t' Missy Bulwer's, an' done hyah de house bu'n, Missy Vo she jes' lookin' at de wall fur a long time 'fo' she speak. Den she say: 'I'se no home, no fathah, no mothah, no gran'-fathah; on'y de cause an' Folly! I'll do all a 'ooman kin.' An' Gord knows she has, she an' he hawse. Ef dyah's a brave man dat needs nussin', she's dyah. An' me, seh! Gord he'p me, I'se been at he heels, me a-servin' an' Marse Soufbridge a-co'tin'; she a-ridin' Folly an' me a-ridin' a mule er a-walkin' er a-beggin' a ride in a wagin. What fur I kyah so I kin look arfter her? What become o' her ef I die? Dat's all dat keeps me livin'. What yo' t'ink she wants t' do? Yes, seh, dat lady ez gentle ez a lady could be! She wan' t' tu'n spy! Yes, seh, de good Lawd he'p us! I tell her ef she do I follow her. I tell her ef she stay I——"

Marcus Aurelius stopped in terror. He recalled that he was not talking to a Confederate.

"You went as a spy yourself?" the Vagabond suggested.

"Fo' Gord, I did!" the old man confessed, bravely. "An' hang me ef yo' wants t'! Dat's an easy way out o' my trubbles! Yes, seh, I tell her

THE VAGABOND

dat ef she go I go too, an' quick's we wuz in de Yankee lines I'd go t' de Yankee Gin'ral an' I say: 'Won' yo' please put dis lady in a comf'ble prison whar she'll do no ha'm? She's out o' he head t' do sech t'ings, 'cause she's a Lanley.' An' she give in an' I went in he place. Hang me, seh! I'se been up an' down yo' lines, a-cringin', sufferin' ole nigger, mumblin' t'ings t' mek yo' Yankees laugh while I coun' yo' rigimints. Please Gord, dis nigger ain' no ingrate. He ain' fightin' ag'in de fo'ks dat bringed him out o' savag'ry into respectumbility. He ain' 'shamed! Hang me!"

"I can't accommodate you there, Marcus. I sha'n't even arrest you. The war's nearly over."

"Over! over!" Marcus leered at the Vagabond and laughed uproariously. "Yes, seh, dat war's been over an' over an' over uver sence it b'gun. An' whenever it's over—tee hee!—Marse Robert (General Lee) he jes' wave he hand an' mo' sowgers come. It wuz over at Gettysburg—tee hee! I see Marse Robert when he come ridin' back a-lookin' like he hed won—al'ays a-lookin' like he hed won! 'Fo' de Lawd, I sez, he come back jes' 'cause he want to. Over! Not s' long's we have Marse Robert a-lookin' so cahm—no, seh!"

"Marcus!" the Vagabond cried, impetuously, "did Miss Lanley ever speak of me?"

"No, seh. She nuver speak o' yo', an' dat are wuz jes' what mek me 'spishun. Yo' 'member dat piece o' paper yo' gi' me arfter she looked de t'oughts out o' yo' head an' de wuds out o' yo' mouf dat day? When she read it she turn all a pinky an' red an' she read ag'in, an' I could see dat paper all a-flutterin' in he

THE VAGABOND

hand, an' she looked 'way kinder far off an' proud, an' den she sez like she suddenly 'member me, 'Dat's all, Marcus,' an' I lef' her 'lone, seh, a-sayin' t' myse'f dat are Yankee sowger has a way—he has a way."

He nodded obsequiously, the while his keen old eyes saw that the Vagabond's face was flushed in its turn and he, too, had a far-away look.

"Arfter dat, she tek t' wearin' a locket 'round he neck, an' ole locket ob he gran-mammy's, an' sometimes I see her a-sittin' all silent playin' wid it in her fingahs ez ef she wuz a-dreamin' o' t'ings dat mout be but mus' nuver be, an' ez ef dat locket hed de whole story o' dat are in it. When he house bu'n she grab dat locket ez ef it wuz a hot coal 'g'inst her breas'—I nuver see her in sech a temper; Marse Robert hisse'f would have quailed befo' her—an' she frew dat locket ez fur into de bresh ez she could. I pick it up, an' I'se keepin' it tell maybe she speak ob it ag'in; dough I'se jes' reck'nin' she nuver will, seh, 'cause ve'y soon I heah she an' Marse Souf-bridge engaged fur sho'. Dey ain' married yet—not yet, please de Lawd. Anyhow, she put whatuver wuz in dat locket out o' he life furuver an' uver. I ain' nuver opened it, no, seh. I reckon I tippie ole marster's wine; I reckon I like t' know what's gwine on 's well ez any body-sarvent; but a op'nin' dat are wuz too much like a-gwine into de young missis' room befo' she call me. But once, when de mule t'ink he wan' t' kyar me on he heels 'stid o' he back, dat locket flew op'n an' I see a piece o' paper wid some little, fine man's writin' on it an' I closed it right up."

He drew forth the treasure from his pocket, a

THE VAGABOND

heart-shaped thing of gold set with turquoise. The Vagabond took it from his yielding fingers, and, tempted by the suggestion that Marcus's information carried, opened it and found, tightly folded, his note—his "I shall wait! I shall hope!"—whose delicate receptacle had risen and fallen on her breast with thoughts of him and had been cast away for any stranger to pick up. He folded the paper and replaced it.

"I'll keep this! I'll keep it!" he said, determinedly.

"Seh! Dat b'longs t' no Yankee sowger! Dat b'longs t' de Lanleys!"

"I'll keep it," the Vagabond repeated. "I've no right except might, and might I cannot now resist. You'll want to get back to the Confederate lines, I suppose. How'll you manage it?"

"A mule. I kin al'ays fin' a mule. Dat's whar a nigger shines. White men hunt an' hunt an' niver see a mule, an' nigger go out whar dey been—an' dyah's a mule! Dat mule been a-waitin' fur dat nigger all de time—yes, seh. I'll fin' a mule, seh, or I'll jes' wait hyah, seh, an' de Confed'rates will come t' me. Yo' won' tarry long; no, seh. Ole house-bu'nin' Sheridan's gwine t' be killed an' buried right hyah in Firginia mud—an' dat's too good fur him. De good Lawd's sent dese rains t' he'p Marse Robert. Yes, seh, when de good Lawd see Marse Robert all a-ridin' so cahm, he's jes' boun' t' he'p Marse Robert!"

The old servant's last words, still repeating themselves in his ears after he had mounted, made the Vagabond see the cavalry as the South must see them; made him see himself as she must see him.

THE VAGABOND

Only that morning he had destroyed a grist-mill with the same regret that the President felt in authorizing such drastic measures to make war's grim reign the shorter and peace the nearer. He had veritably coaxed himself into the belief that the Potomac would be as narrow as it was in the beginning, once the conflict was over; that when the sabre-blade was draped in the laurel-branch the struggle would mean no more to a Confederate girl and a Union officer than the tiffs of courtship to the happy couple on the bridal morn. Her own house was in ashes, burned by Union hands. If she had heard of him at all during their separation it was as likely in connection with some raid as in the more welcome task of battle. The picture of her flight from him as a scourge had replaced, for the thousandth time, the sweet one that had been his ship of stars. Then the sound of shots ahead made him forget all else, as he gave rein, except that he was a captain of horse on a scout.

XLII

A RECOGNITION

Long since used to the various situations of cavalry warfare, he presumed that his men had developed the enemy as they were sent to do, and were already falling back in due course. At first Breaker's struggling steps in the mud drowned the muffled sound of a mass of hoofs. When he did hear it, there was no mistaking that throbbing, rapid tread of the gallop, however dim. His good fellows were charging. The thrilling zest of conflict mounted to his head, and his haste was imparted to his steed. He hoped to see what it was all about at the turn of the road; but the wind blowing away from him, he had no appreciation of how near he was to his company, which suddenly sprang into view in tempestuous retreat. He did not have time to stop, only to draw Breaker to one side while the Federals swept past, bespattering their leader with mud.

"Get back!" cried Tim Booker, who was in advance. "We're leading these Johnnies into camp!"

Twenty yards behind, in bloodthirsty pursuit, were three or four troops of Confederates, discharging carbines and revolvers and shouting. Next, the Vagabond had a glimpse of Jimmy Pool at the rear of his column. Before Tim's warning was fairly out of his mouth he saw Jimmy's horse stumble and fall,

THE VAGABOND

throwing its rider fairly into the path of five hundred hoofs which no power could arrest. He started toward his lieutenant, thinking that with his body and Breaker's he would split that havoc of soldiery as a rock splits a current, and thus prevent Jimmy from being trampled to death. But before Breaker had his feet out of the slough into which they had sunk, the foam from the front rank of the enemy's horse was thrown into his face.

However, Jimmy Pool had not lost his wits; he was languid in off-times only to insure agility for supreme moments. Before he struck earth his danger was clear to him. He sprang for the edge of the embanked road as if sliding for second, and sabres dipped toward him in vain, the while he rolled away in the mire. There they were, these two Yankees, just out of reach of that cataract of the enemy's horse and no more. Undischarged cartridges were instantly sent after the Vagabond; but his shoulderstraps were no more than a glint of braid to each passing trooper, his materialization so sudden and out of the programme that the call to shoot him from the rest of a plunging saddle was as bootless as to tell a man to reach out of the window of an express train and catch the mail-bag at the station two hundred yards ahead.

He had no sooner comprehended Jimmy's immediate safety with a cry of delight than he realized the danger of their being left with one horse if a dozen Confederates should draw rein and return for the goodly prize of a brace of Federal officers. The whistling of the wildly aimed bullets fired at his own head gave him the inspiration he needed. He had a

THE VAGABOND

steady position, and he ought to get his man, he thought, as he drew his revolver and fired at the last trooper in the line, who dropped out of his saddle. Clinging to his reins, the shock of his dead weight brought his horse to a stand-still.

"There's a mount for you, Jimmy!" the Vagabond called.

"I'm damned if there is!" responded the Confederate, as he raised himself with an effort. He drove his sabre in the sweating neck, and his faithful ally's blood joined his own. "They'll come back and pick you up," he added, faintly.

Both of the Federals were watching the column, which went on in the enthusiasm of the charge with no more idea of stopping, as yet, than a hound on the scent of a fox stops for a rabbit. As they turned toward the wounded man, the rain began to fall again.

"That's good," said the Confederate. "It'll swell the river so you house-burners can't get across!"

He died, smiling triumphantly, his head resting on the shoulder of his dead steed. The Vagabond pressed his eyelids shut respectfully and admiringly.

"House-burners! It's the right term. That's what we are," said the Vagabond, absently.

"We sha'n't have the chance to burn any more houses unless we get out of here pretty quick," Jimmy added. "No horse can carry two across those fields, and that's how we'll have to go. I can hoof it; in fact, I'd rather." For the first time he started to rise, and, swaying, caught himself by putting his hand on his Captain's shoulder. "Turned my foot, I guess," he said. When he tried to touch it to the ground, his face twitched with pain. "Nonsense!"

THE VAGABOND

he exclaimed. "I must have used it to get out of their way." He put it to the ground again, and restrained a groan with set lips.

"Your ankle is sprained, and there is an end of it," said the Vagabond.

"I guess it is, seeing that the danger isn't so imminent as it was a minute ago," was the dry response.

Thereupon, the Vagabond picked up his slight lieutenant bodily, and with all the gentleness possible set him astride Breaker.

"He'll take you safe ashore. Come, there's no time to lose"—this last was spoken in view of a line of infantry that appeared in the distance marching from the South, evidently to support the cavalry—"and no protests. You said yourself that the horse couldn't carry two. I'll have the easiest end of it walking. All I've got to do is to keep out of sight. There's this blessing about the rain and mud, nobody but a fugitive will think of getting off the road without an object. General Grant, if he has the strength, could walk back to our lines in as great safety as he could go along the works at Petersburg."

They passed over the highway, Breaker floundering, with the steam rising from his rain-drenched flanks. The Vagabond, picking his way behind them, stopped when they came to the cover of a scrubby patch of second growth, fringed by willows that had grown over a rail-fence long since gone to make camp-fires.

"Look here! Aren't you coming?" Jimmy called.

"No. I'm going to have a look at the Confederate infantry on the march to see if they like the rain and mud as well as we do."

THE VAGABOND

"What did you say about no time to lose? It's not the General's intention to make a stand here. The thing for us is to catch up with our forces."

"Orders, Lieutenant!" called the Vagabond.

"Yes, sir," was the response, with a stiff salute; and your regular rode on, not once looking back.

The Vagabond shook the water off his cap and waited for the approach of the infantry, a bedrizzled line in ragged gray or ragged brown or ragged anything that would cover a soldier's nakedness. They carried their rifles at whatever shift was easiest for the shoulders of fifty beside those of eighteen, in the gleanings of all the manhood that a people had left to make the loss of a cause magnificent. For they knew! they knew! They had known ever since Atlanta had fallen, and from impossibilities they had drawn the charm of a bold front to despair. They marched in step from sympathy rather than from military formula, with swinging, slouching grace, looking as if they were going to kill or be killed and little caring which, so it was done in honor to their sovereign State, their sovereign town, their sovereign family, their sovereign selves, and a sovereign principle of disintegration which must eventually be its own destruction. As they passed they gave heat to their drenched bodies, they lessened the depth of the clammy mud, with gibes, one of which was to the effect that considering the outpour from the skies anybody who went above, that afternoon, ought to be grateful, for he would have a dry bed.

An unusually lanky man of a rear rank, like the wagging tail of which his company was the body, seesawed to the side of the road, more by impulse

THE VAGABOND

than by prearrangement. Some of his comrades called him a skunk, without qualifications; others wondered how any one human being could find in those times enough whiskey to drown his sorrows; and still others dilated on the awful selfishness of the man who would not pass his canteen when the very earth around him was shaking with the chills of his fellow-sufferers. In niggardly fear of having it appropriated then and there, the culprit put the rusty nozzle to his lips and drained the remainder of that native product of corn so amazingly effective in ratio to its quantity. Whereupon, he cried "Hooray!" on principle, and lying down in the mud, with big drops of rain trickling off the end of his nose, remarked on the softness of the feather-ticks in this hotel, though the roof did seem a little leaky. There he lay, while more infantry and guns and still more infantry went by; and then, as far as one could see, there was no sign of a human being.

The Vagabond pondered on how much the fellow knew of things that interested Sheridan, and now he approached, only to find him quite too full for utterance. Looking down the road he saw that some of the infantry were already returning from their useless sortie. This advancing patch on the ribbon of mud brought him another idea, as irresistible as it was dangerous. He picked the Confederate up and carried him behind the bushes, his load becoming animate enough to remark that it was pleasant to ride in a spring-wagon after having marched so much. Whipping off his own sopping uniform, by dint of arduous care, which did not awaken the patient to a sense of the transformation, he removed

THE VAGABOND

the tattered garb of his accomplice, whose rifle he threw across his own shoulder. Then he buckled on his own sabre, which he would no more have left behind than a lady her jewel-case. Except for this tell-tale, as he walked into the road with his shoulders thrown forward and otherwise simulating his new character, he was a private of the Confederacy. But first he made sure that he was not presenting himself to the drunken man's own regiment.

There was no sign in the faces of the approaching veterans of any ill feeling on account of the folly which sent old soldiers on a fool's errand. They had learned the great lesson that there are a hundred march outs to one battle. They were making their legs go, and not wasting energy in complaints. They took the Vagabond for a straggler, and began to pass remarks about the poor infant's stomachache or his headache or the length of his mamma's apron-strings, when a sharp-eyed fellow, who looked and thought before he spoke, recognizing the belt with the brass plate stamped U. S. A. and the Union officer's sabre, changed gibe into curiosity. The new private was prepared for the question with a Southern drawl:

"Yes. Knocked that Yankee clean out of his saddle. That's why I'm here. Think it was worth dropping out of ranks for, don't you? Taste this!" He offered the drunken man's canteen, which contained the contents of his own flask. "Pass it around and take a sip apiece."

"Yes, a sip!" echoed along the line of tongues as dry as the road was wet in those days when the teetotalers on either side were as rare as square meals.

THE VAGABOND

It was amazing how few sips it took to find the bottom. Those who got none wet their lips with the tips of their tongues, growled at luck, and accepted the fortunes of war with becoming fatalism. An old man, with the moth-patches already forming around his eyes, stepped out of the ranks and tapped the Vagabond on the shoulder with a shaking forefinger.

"Comrade, there wasn't any coffee on that Yank? Coffee!" he repeated. "Roasted peas! Roasted peas and swill! When you reach my age you can't stomach it. For one good drink of coffee—I know men that's deserted for that," and he fell back into the steady, monotonous step with the check of the regretful negative.

As the Vagabond regarded him, he understood as he had not before the admirable fortitude of a people who would rob the cradle and the grave in the name of their pride. The South was not a "quitter."

"Coffee! Ma's coffee! I kin 'member what it was 'fo' the war," drawled a boy of seventeen. "Coffee!"

"Didn't you get his saddle or anything? Jest his sabre?" asked another.

"Didn't he have a watch? Wasn't his boots better'n yours?" from an avaricious fellow, who had learned to make the most of war's personal opportunities.

Ready invention is often more serviceable than truth when the truth is awkward, and ready invention the Vagabond possessed fruitfully, if not as expansively as Timothy Booker.

"Pipped him off his horse and his horse ran away with the saddle. There's his watch," he drew his

THE VAGABOND

own from his pocket, "and there's his boots," with a glance toward his feet.

"He didn't have any underclothes on? Nawthin' to keep old bones warm?" asked the old man.

The Vagabond showed his own garment of wool.

"Brandy and wool! They ain't got no blockade over there! Brandy and wool! How can we fight that? Fight it we will! Fight it we will, though we live on roots and grubs and fleas! Alabama's still a sovereign State—still—a—sovereign—State, by God! That's what I always say to chirk me up when I feel just as if I'd walk over to the Yanks and sell my soul for a full belly!"

The Vagabond launched into an elaborate tale of how he had taken his prisoner, and when his new-found companions were in good humor he turned to the object of his disguise. He reckoned that as soon as spring came and the boys on leave got back to their regiments, the Confederates would drive the Federals back to Washington. He reckoned that there must be forty thousand men in Lynchburg. A chorus wanted to know who had been coddling him with that yarn. Their consensus of opinion of five thousand was the information he wanted. His optimism in nowise dimmed, he said he had heard that there were fifty guns in Lynchburg.

"Fifty!" came a guffawing answer, "fifty! There's fifteen—old-timers. Uncle Robert's got all the good ones with him. Because you've taken a prisoner you seem to think that we're as strong as we was at Gettysburg. When you get over the effects of that Yank's brandy you'll divide by four, sonny."

"If you fellows keep on you'll make me desert,"

THE VAGABOND

the Vagabond concluded. "I'll just drop out and wait for my company. Don't want to get separated from them. They're going to camp in the White House grounds to-night." After the laughter had subsided he added: "A little imagination helps a man to keep up his spirits;" and they called back their good wishes over their shoulders to the wag who had enlivened the dull ordeal of their shivering, bedraggled march, while he lifted his remnant of a hat in profound dignity and responded, with the wind-driven drops pattering on his face, that if there was anything in the world he hated it was a drought like that which then prevailed in Virginia.

Leaning on his rifle, he settled himself to wait long enough to give verisimilitude to his excuse, when he intended to hasten back to his drunken alter ego. Looking away from the direction of its coming, he was not aware until he heard its steps of the approach of a horse. He turned to see Volilla coming toward him not fifty yards away. In this crisis he thought first of stepping back a few feet and facing about. Even that was unnecessary, he told himself. If he merely hung his head she would not mistake him for any other than a ragged foot-soldier who had dropped out of the ranks to rest.

But if she should recognize him! If she should recognize him in the garb of a spy, what would she say and do? How had that face of his dreams changed in four years? Folly, being as intent on picking his way in the least muddy places as if he wore a skirt and slippers, now took the Vagabond's side of the road. The Vagabond realized the risk of discovery to himself and the embarrassment of it to

THE VAGABOND

her; but desire to see her shattering all discretion, he lifted his cap and looked straight at her.

"*You!*" she said, in a stifled cry.

That old word she had used so often when circumstances brought them abruptly together. "*You!*" He liked her to say that. It singled him out from the rest of the world in her comprehension. It was a distinction that he welcomed with his smile of jaunty confidence, which made all dangers reflected as happiness in the mirror of her nearness. Each line from eyebrow to chin he lingered on in loving comparison with that of four years ago. She was grown older and more mature; the tan of exposure was on her cheek; her expression had been chastened into a greater nobility by the sufferings of her people; and, withal, time had revealed the inner grandeur of her nature, even as Richard Bulwer had prophesied. It was as natural for him to be silent in her presence as for a subject before his throne.

"You again!" She dwelt on the second word with clinging familiarity, the while she realized the momentous fact that his life depended on her nod.

"Yes. I didn't come to see you this time," he added. "I promised myself the hardihood to wait until the war was over."

Foolish words! They put a taunting tongue to the nature of his mission evident from his garb. They said to her: "Your heart will not let you divulge my secret, now, will it, after all?" Under the spell of them, her reply was as cold and sharp as the rapier-point of her sudden determination.

"You come to learn if we are weak enough to let your house-burners destroy Lynchburg! I will tell our Colonel where to find a spy!"

XLIII

WHICH HAS LIMITS

He bowed, yet not so low that she had not a view of his laughing eyes, which made the sign of a culprit's mock confession as his parting message. Well he knew that his capture meant that he would be hanged. Not bravado, not contempt for death—life being as dear to him as the interest and excitement of promised achievement can make it—rather the fascination of the situation held him in his tracks while he saw her accost the foremost officer of an approaching group.

Something in the Colonel's attitude told the lone figure, with his head thrown back as if welcoming the rain in sheer, unrestrained physical exuberance, that she had indeed kept her word. There was yet time for him to make a good fight for escape by plunging into the swamp, where a horse could go little faster than a man, to say nothing of the fact that he had a rifle against the revolvers of the officers. Still he tarried, with the helpless intoxication of one who cannot resist a dénouement. Would she remain steadfast to her threat when it came to the very performance of it? Was there no answering love for him, was there not at least the pull of association deep under the crust of factional strife? If there was, it would stay her at the critical moment,

THE VAGABOND

he thought dimly, as he looked toward the soggy fields. He felt, if he did not see, the cavalcade growing nearer. When they were close, the Colonel and Volilla leading, he looked up and saluted the one, while he smiled at the other. Her face was stern.

"Deliver up that rifle, my fine sir!" the Colonel said, whipping out his revolver suddenly.

The Vagabond complied pleasantly. It did not matter so much that his doom was sealed as that she had sealed it. He was spellbound by her deed rather than by his own fate.

"And you had the audacity to keep your sabre, too!" the Colonel stormed, at sight of the U. S. A. on the belt and the very contempt for Confederate acumen that it seemed to imply.

The Vagabond felt his hand going to his hilt in further compliance; he realized that he was still smiling in set intensity; he knew that he was going to sell his life as dearly as he could, and that end would be best served by bringing the blade out of its scabbard in the begrudging languor that seems to accept the inevitable, belying its contemplated flash into action with the energy of despair. His plan needed only the confidence of boyhood and rare coolness. However much manhood had taught him about other things, it could teach him nothing in this. The quality of lightning thought and lightning execution and clear perception in a crisis were born in him along with his sentiment. He could feel his toes shucking in his wet boots as he raised himself on them and measured the lunge to the Colonel's heart, and counted on the fury of his overhead slashes until the staff brought him down. Then, as the sabre

THE VAGABOND

cleared its peaceful threshold, her voice broke on his ear as from a great distance:

"Colonel, please ask the prisoner to take off his cap."

This he did mechanically, still holding fast to his sabre, while he saw that she was scrutinizing him with seemingly disinterested curiosity. Her ruse, too, was worthy of her. It showed, besides, how worthy she was of him.

"I was mistaken, Colonel," she said, in the same matter-of-fact manner. "The resemblance is remarkable, though."

The Colonel's expression changed as suddenly as that of a fisherman when his trout breaks away from the hook.

"What regiment do you belong to—you straggler?"

"First Georgy, sir."

"What the devil are you doing here? Where did you get that Yankee sabre?"

The Vagabond, with the proper respect and yet the proper nonchalance of the man who is perfectly sure of the unimpeachability of his conduct, related how he had pipped that Yankee officer out of his saddle.

"Didn't you find any papers on him?"

"No, sir."

The Colonel was a suspicious man by nature, of the kind who would not be sure that there were only slugs under a stone until he had lifted it.

"Show me the way to him!" he cried.

Against this new turn of affairs there was nothing that Volilla could do or say, even if she had been of the mind.

THE VAGABOND

"It's a good piece, Colonel," said the Vagabond, as solicitously as a well-meaning private could.

"Probably seems a good piece to you. Come along. Miss Lanley"—the Colonel lifted his cap with a flourish—"I am as glad for your own sake as for our men's that there are no wounded," and she rode away toward the South.

On his part, the Vagabond had only the view of her back, and the mighty happiness over her weakening when the vital test came disappeared in his new difficulty. One plan after another for ridding himself of the Colonel was dismissed, until he thought of this. When they should come to a tree he would jump behind it and with his rifle pay this party armed only with revolvers and sabres for the trouble they had made him. But, unfortunately, the prime adjunct at that moment lay across the saddle-horn of the Colonel's aide.

"I'll take that spitfire of mine if you say, sir," he said, advancing toward it.

"Never mind; you've got to walk," said the Colonel, quashing the hope of escape with his consideration for a weary private.

"Yes, sir."

When he started across the fields, it was with the determination of giving the Colonel and his staff their money's worth. With their horses floundering behind him, he was not in the least oblivious of the humor of the situation. His one chance was to lead the Colonel on until they should be rushed by his own men, who were doubtless keeping close to the Confederates in the same exasperating way that the Colonel was keeping close to him. He went as fast as

THE VAGABOND

he could without running, and, finding a ridge of higher ground where the going was better, he made their horses fall into a trot to keep up with him.

"About how much farther is it?" demanded the Colonel, finally.

"I can't say just. It's right over there some piece." The Vagabond pointed straight ahead.

"That's just where you pointed before."

"Yes, sir. I tried to bring you in a straight line so as to save distance."

"Is it beyond those trees there, or this side of 'em?"

"A little beyond, sir."

"What kind of soldiers do you breed in Georgia, anyway? That's farther than our forces have been. How could you get that distance from your regiment? Are you a separate command?"

The Vagabond had expected this inquiry long before, but the Colonel was rather stupid as well as tenacious.

"As I was telling you, sir, I'm considered pretty slick at dodging in and out, and they put me on the flank by my lonesome, to see what I could see. I seen this Yank a good distance away tie his horse to a tree and sneak up on foot, and I tried to get between him and his horse and couldn't; but I brought him down after he was in the saddle. It ain't much farther; fifteen minutes' walk, Colonel."

"Fifteen for those legs of yours?"

"Yes, sir; these legs of mine can work up a powerful lot of motion on a bacon-rind and a hoe-cake. I reckon if this war lasts much longer I can get a

THE VAGABOND

square meal by running a rind back and forth under my nose."

This brought the laugh which the Vagabond craved.

"With such soldiers," the Colonel declared to his aide, "the blue-bellies will never whip us."

"If you'd like," the Vagabond added, "you can wait here, sir, and I'll run on ahead and look the body over again to see if there are any papers."

Given that much lead, he was certain that he could escape. Alas, the Colonel's good-humor only gave him an idea for winning his General's praise. He concluded to ride on, thinking that he might come in contact with the enemy and gain information, though he found nothing valuable on the Yankee officer. Directly, there appeared on the edge of the woods, which was their objective, a line of horsemen, not more than four or five hundred yards away. The Vagabond recognized them instantly as his own men.

"About a troop, I should say," observed the Colonel, looking through his glasses.

For the Vagabond there was safety and honor and command within sight—if!

"If the Lieutenant there will just let me have that little pet of mine I reckon I can tally one over there," he suggested to the Colonel.

"You'll bring 'em all down on us"—which was precisely what the Vagabond wanted. "No, we'll be going back."

Even as he spoke, the Vagabonds began a circling movement toward the West, as if they were bound for the flank of the Confederates, while their Captain, in his sadly bedraggled Confederate gray, knew

THE VAGABOND

that they were seeking him, and was helpless to give them that word which would have left the man on foot to their gentle mercy while the officers fled to save themselves.

"Colonel, the way we came I reckon is best for the horses, but I can cut across there to the road on foot, if you don't mind."

"We'll all cut across. Young man, you're pretty clever, but you make too d— many suggestions," the Colonel concluded. "Step along lively there and obey orders!"

The Vagabond began to realize that he was tired; the mud seemed much deeper than it was when he was approaching his own lines. His chance of escape was now entirely embraced in the length of time that a drunken torpor should last. The rain and the moist, cold bed of mud must soon bring, if it had not already, that private to a sense of his position, when, crying his wrongs as he went, he would start in search of the man who had betrayed his identity. They found the road vacant, all the troops that had gone out in the sortie apparently having returned to the garrison town. As they approached the two dead horses and the dead Confederate soldier whose saddle the Vagabond had emptied for Jimmy's sake, the Colonel's maledictions on the heads of their Yankee murderers were interrupted by a howl of "Murder! Thieves! Doctor! Doctor!"

The horsemen stopped; but before they could seek the source of the outcry the tipsy private, a club in his hand, his bloodshot eyes popping and his face expressing ghastly perplexity and resentment of foul wrong, sprang out of the bushes. He halted at sight

THE VAGABOND

of the Vagabond as if he had seen ghosts. He did not recognize the man, but there was no mistaking the identity of his own ragged coat.

"I know that patch!" he cried, wildly. "He did it! He did it! While I fainted he took my clothes and left these! He is a Yankee! a Yankee! Look at his sabre! Look at his belt!"

"Well, you've got 'em again, Bill," said the Vagabond. "You would have that officer's brandy all to yourself when you were already full up with the corn whiskey you had taken away from that poor old woman. Of course, you don't remember now how mean you acted about it."

"Bill" simply looked and gasped on hearing this. He wondered if it were true. He was not certain of anything since he drank that corn whiskey.

"You see, Colonel," the Vagabond went on, glibly, "I didn't tell you about Bill's share in taking that Yankee, 'cause I didn't want you to see the shape Bill's in. He grabbed the brandy-flask and the clothes, too, and I let him have 'em to humor him. All I wanted was the sabre—that's the real trophy, sir."

Having directed himself entirely to the Colonel, he did not observe "Bill," who had recalled definitely that he had not taken any bottle from a poor old woman. This gave Bill strength and assurance; his injured virtue rose into a maudlin rage. Before anyone realized his intention, he had brought the Vagabond to earth with a quick blow from the rear.

XLIV

TO RISK IS TO PAY

The next that the Vagabond knew, someone was fingering about his throat and saying:

"I reckon no Georgia private is wearing as fine undershirts as that these days. W. W., eh? Wonder what those initials stand for?"

It did not take long to ascertain from papers in his pocket that they stood for William Williams, whose name and importance were not unknown to the officers present. The prisoner, with growing consciousness, tried to move, and found that his wrists had been tied.

"It is a great compliment to me, sir, that five armed Confederates are afraid of my two poor hands," he said.

"Nothing but the usual treatment of a spy," was the reply.

"You mean of a commissioned officer taken in action." This claim was so fragile that he made it all the more boldly.

"Of a man disguised in our uniform, who will be shot as a spy, or hung—more likely hung." The Colonel's cheeks were still stinging with resentment at the way he had been tricked.

"Yes, disguised on the moment and still retaining his sabre, and, therefore, entirely within his rights."

THE VAGABOND

"When it is a matter of gallantry to an enemy," the Colonel went on, "I yield to no man. To you, sir—rise and move on!"

Placed between the Colonel and one of his aides, with the private, his rifle in hand, watching him a little to the rear, the prisoner kept pace with his captors.

"Thought you could pick off one of those Yankee horsemen if I'd let you have your rifle; thought you'd get to your company quicker if we separated, did you?" growled the Colonel, after a time, in doubt whether to consider the capture as a compliment to himself or quite the contrary. "Going to lead me to the corpse of that Yankee officer, weren't you?"

"Well, Colonel, since I'm the officer," was the smiling response, "and since you say I'm to die—all you have to do is to follow me, as I said, and you'll see that I kept my word."

The Colonel's laugh came up from his gaunt interior in increasing force until he beat his sides.

"I confess you stick to a man like his mother-in-law," the Vagabond continued. "It's no blame of mine that I didn't get away; it's entirely owing to your carefulness."

Under the caress of such flattery, the Colonel soon concluded that he had acted wisely and well, and his chagrin disappeared. The inevitable consequence was admiration for the Vagabond's good-humor, which he expressed for the second time before they ran the gauntlet of the curious soldiers of the garrison and the prisoner found himself under guard at dusk in a tobacco warehouse which had been improvised into a prison. A plate of rice and bacon was served to him by the light of a candle, which was

THE VAGABOND

taken away when the meal was finished on the plea that candles were "skeerce." He heard the talk of loitering soldiers outside the window, brought by a curiosity which the pacing sentry partially satisfied in a manner not entirely complimentary to the prisoner and yet by no means entirely uncomplimentary.

"Yes, sir, it's William Williams, the devil that made the charge at Manassas (Bull Run); that's cut through our lines ag'in an' ag'in; that burned the grist-mill at Clairville yistiddy! He don't look harf as ornery as he is; fact, don't look ornery at all. Tall, blue-eyed cuss, that smiles as if hangin' was a fur-lough."

When, his arms pressing those of two men of a corporal's guard, he was led across the street to the town-hall, now the commanding general's head-quarters, he strained his eyes in the darkness in a hope that Volilla might be in the little crowd, though he well knew that it was against all reason that she should. He was conducted into a room where half a dozen officers were seated around a table lighted by two candles—the court-martial! At the head was the General, a man with scraggly beard, dark, piercing eyes, thin lips, a big, aquiline nose, a protruding chin, and a narrow forehead. He was sunk low in his chair, smoking a cob pipe, and beyond his sharp and steady gaze he made no sign in recognition of the prisoner's entry. The Colonel was seated at one side, evidently a witness, and the Vagabond adjudged himself wise to have made this boaster his friend. Without removing his pipe, sententiously, with a certain rough dignity, the General named the charges, and called for the captor's story. But it was soon

THE VAGABOND

evident that the Colonel's good-humor had been curried only to exalt his egotism. According to his Bobadilian tale, he had a subtle appreciation instantly he looked into the prisoner's eye that there was something wrong with him. He neglected to mention such a detail as the hint he had received from Volilla.

"I questioned him, sir," said the Colonel, "and his answers were suspicious. I had no proof except my intuition—my intuition, sir. Said I, 'Young man, you don't get out of my sight. Let us see your Union officer you killed.' He took me toward the place, but it was always beyond, beyond—beyond, in the Yankee lines. I was convinced; but still I had no proof. Then the private with whom he exchanged clothes appeared. By a stratagem I was able to bring him to you alive, a simple stratagem, as follows," and thus he ran on.

The General had shown no sign of interest beyond knocking his pipe-bowl with his knuckles and leaning forward to relight the heel, when the bright light and his cheeks sucked in made his face sinister and uncompromising.

"You're positively Machiavellian," he said, dryly, when the Colonel had finished. Then he called for the private, who, under his sharp questioning, was obliged to include the cause of his discomfiture in his testimony. After he had retired, somewhat crest-fallen, the General turned to the Vagabond, his eyes drawn to two beads of bitter scrutiny.

The Vagabond met the stare with his lips parted, his head thrown back, and a smile playing on his lips, while his blue eyes, as they had on another occasion,

THE VAGABOND

received the shaft as the sea receives the lightning. Angry with himself for making jokes to please his captor, his dignity now came back full panoplied in a fine contempt. He was in their power, he reasoned; he had taken a risk, and had been caught, and it was not his place to cavil. So he found pleasure in answering the General's searching questions with outspoken truth. The sympathy of the younger members of the court was chivalrously enlisted when, finally, the General asked if he had anything to say for himself. They leaned forward expectantly, hoping and believing, such was his reputation, that audaciously and cunningly he was keeping back some master-stroke in his favor as a climax.

"Nothing," he replied.

The General was an irreconcilable; one of those stern believers whose sacrifices for even a false principle always awaken more admiration than the most ardent weather-vane that swings over an expansive coat and a well-filled stomach. If souls do revisit the scenes of their activity, then his is still charging up and down the Shenandoah at the head of his shattered cohorts.

"By every rule of war you are a spy. The time for the Confederacy to draw fine distinctions is past," he said. "We have not forgotten that in the Gettysburg campaign General Lee impressed nothing and destroyed nothing; nor have we forgotten"—it seemed as if the breath carrying the words came ice-cold between his white teeth, showing now that his pipe was removed with each clearly uttered word of his slowly spoken sentences—"the nature of General Sheridan's return in the Valley campaign. He made

THE VAGABOND

the land as bare as your hand. If a drunken Union soldier was shot by one of his own comrades in a brawl, he killed the adult inhabitants of the vicinity and burned their houses, but in his infinite tenderness set the children adrift to starve while he served out rations and feather-beds to the blacks."

Every exaggerated rumor about the North was as surely gospel to the General as those about the South to the abolitionist agitator.

"General Sheridan is my superior and my hero, sir, and you will realize the helplessness of my position to make adequate rejoinder," said the Vagabond.

"I beg your pardon, and I stand corrected," observed the General; then continued, "Sheridan justified his action on the ground of military necessity. On that ground, you shall be shot to-morrow morning. I will not hang any brave man, no matter how bad he is."

XLV

WHEN LIFE CALLS

The Vagabond's soft whistle to keep a cry from his lips was taken, as well it might be from his attitude and expression, as signifying the finest stoicism. Even the General was affected.

"Have you any request to make?" he asked, more pleasantly than he had yet spoken.

"Only this: I think, gentlemen, that any one of you being in my position and of my rank would have disguised himself as gladly as I did for the same object." It pleased their fancy that they would; they nodded. "I did not lose my sabre in actual conflict," he went on. "I need not say to you how dear his sabre is to a cavalry-man when he has wielded it for four years. I recognize that it is your prize. Nevertheless, I am going to ask that I may name the person whose prize it shall be—a Confederate. Do you consent, General?"

"Yes."

"And one thing more. I have a note to send with the sabre. I see you have pen, ink, and paper there. May I write it now?"

His strange request was granted, and seating himself he wrote, under the shadow of death, in his confident way, as if she, indeed, were his betrothed:

THE VAGABOND

“DEAR:

“I am sending you my sabre. Will you, as a last favor to a soldier of the enemy, let it have a place on the walls of that new Lanleyton which awaits you as mistress one of these days? I ask you to believe that, despite all reports, it has ever been clean. It would not be if I had not drawn it for my principles against the dictates of my heart's love. Though I have fought against you and yours, it has been to hasten the time when I should come to you, still hoping after the long wait, in the first halcyon days of peace. The chance of war prevents this and relieves you of embarrassment. Besides, it is fitting, I should say, that you should have my sabre, for you alone ever disarmed me. May it remind you that my story was true, and make you think no evil of me. Long ago, I had willed such interest in my mine as it was fair to my partners to give, to you. May it remind you that one of the house-burners preferred to be a house-builder. My reward I have already enjoyed in the better manhood I have drawn from knowing you, from dreaming of you, and from loving you.

“YOUR VAGABOND.”

“I will trust you, General, to keep the name of the person a secret.”

On reading the name the General looked from the envelope to the prisoner sharply, but otherwise gave no sign of his surprise.

“As you wish,” he said.

Then, in his admiration, he advanced and held out his hand to the Vagabond, as did each officer of the

THE VAGABOND

court in turn, adding a kindly "Good-night." Such politeness seems in this distant time as turning the knife in a wound; but these men had become too familiar with death to think of it as more than a loss at cards. Years of warfare had taken them out of themselves. They were automatons of fate.

The corporal of the guard, who had overlooked the trial, addressed the prisoner as "Sir" when they took him back to darkness and the iron-barred room, where he was left with only the sound of a sentry pacing up and down the corridor and another outside the window. It was now that reaction set in, and he began to marvel at his coolness in face of death, as he had sometimes marvelled at his readiness to take unnecessary risks in action.

"A rich man, or with the makings of one fast in a hill-side," he said, in disgust. "A rich man leaving his property to swing a sabre on a captain's pay while the noise of his machinery was calling him. A rich man"—he paused, the lines of the Judge's impromptu peroration on the court-house steps running through his mind. "That is not it. I count no more than the private in the rear ranks. But I count as much! I count as much! I am in the full tide of youth. I have before me all the joy of manhood's striving."

He thought of the quartz that awaited crushing to feed the coffers of States and the crucibles of the arts; of the mines undiscovered; of skill turning bleak, unproductive surfaces into granaries of wealth; of how much there was yet to see and do; of the girdling, in fact, of the globe that he had often girdled in vagabondish fancy.

THE VAGABOND

Then the face of the girl beset him. The mole was playing into the dimple, and he imagined her on a porch in her riding-habit at dawn. He assisted her to mount. They rode down a curving drive, and then they stopped and looked back at the great house he had built for her, and they looked at the fields stretching afar, and they clasped hands, their eyes brimming with their oneness, and said, "Ours! ours! ours!" The prospect of such mornings, the prospect of work and strife and loving and being loved, beckoned to him from the vista of the long years—seeming so long from the younger side—which bring silver hairs.

"It is a little hard, a little hard!" he half-whispered, "and I had thought that a few men might be better and live better for my being in the world."

Presently he told himself that he had only been building again on the basis of her love. This roseate future that he pictured involved a condition which his very presence behind those bars made an impossibility. That she was unaware of his capture and of his sentence as well was inconceivable. She had come to him with no word of sympathy; there was no evidence that she had lifted her finger to mitigate his punishment. He was strictly a spy to her, strictly an enemy of her people, now, for whom no exception should be made. It had not occurred to him to seek her assistance. Importunity was outside his nature. She had saved his life once when his folly endangered it; only the certainty of her love could give him an excuse for asking that which before she had granted without the asking, when folly, this time not for her sake but for folly's sake alone, had

THE VAGABOND

been his downfall. He had played ; he had lost ; and he must lay the blame at his own door.

If he might not have her, he thought, then the knowledge of the fact should reconcile him to death—philosophy that did not long prevail. It was hopeless for him to contemplate the few brief hours he had without her in the scheme. His imagination again placed her at his side. Before morning he had a life's work to do. He began by showing her the mine ; there was the new machinery to be installed, the house to build, the trip to Europe, all in the first few years. Over every fancied day he might spend a fancied minute. Sleep was as out of the question as his rescue by a miracle. Criminals may rest well and eat well in the face of the gallows ; your man of spirit and honor has food for thought, and the dignity of his departure, when life pulls him with the strands of ambition and varied interests, is that of pride and culture rather than that of the fatted calf. Out of the last second he should draw the imagery of combat with obstacles. So he lived on, month by month—a man in a dream—until the striking of the town-clock at the hour of four brought him back to his cell. The symphony was at end ; the seats were being pulled up in banging chorus.

Of a sudden he had the feeling of the lion awakened to find himself bound by the web of thread woven by the pattering mouse. He was to be shot while he was inanimate as a stick of wood. Masculine force, which is never quite reconciled to death, now ran high. Could he have had the General and his court before him at that moment, he would have defied them in a rage to give him a broom-stick against

THE VAGABOND

all their swords. He groped his way to the iron-barred windows and softly, so that the sentry should not hear, he tested them one by one. All were fast. His fingers ran down one to its base and then up to the top. They were not set in stone, but in wood sills, that had been hastily put in when the warehouse was turned into a jail. He patted that wood as if it were his lost child, found. All that he needed was something to cut, and he would soon have an opening and a weapon in hand. He ran his fingers through his pockets in useless effort, for his knife had been taken from him with his sabre. He groped over the floor for some cutting instrument, and not so much as a sliver of rock could he find. In an hour it would be light. He had only his nails to work with, and were they of chilled steel he could not have freed himself. He leaned against the bars for a moment of abandoned helplessness. The silence of the town, broken only by the sentry's footsteps, seemed to press the breath out of his lungs. Then, when the sentry was at the opposite end of his beat, he heard a soft whisper very near at hand, and he knew that Marcus Aurelius, though he could not see his black face for the inky night, was on the other side of the bars.

"Missy Lanley she do nuffin'! I—" The sentry was approaching and silence followed. "I bringed yo' dis knife. Yo' kin cut dose bars out o' de wood. When yo'se out, sneak 'long dis side o' de street tell yo' come to Marcus Aurelius—" and the black philosopher was gone.

She would do nothing! She knew, then! She might already have his sabre. Why should he make

THE VAGABOND

the effort, when bereft of the very object of living? But effort was manna to him; a fighting chance, intoxication. Softly he began to ply the knife at the base of the middle bar. In the darkness the work was slow; the iron was sunk deeper than he thought and spread at the end and clamped with nails, so he had to free it from above as well as below. The breaking of dawn found him with one bar free, but without an opening large enough for his body. At least he had a weapon that assured his death in action.

Then he heard steps in the corridor, and the bolt of the door slide back. The guard had come for him. He could feel his muscles straining like hawsers while he waited for them to enter.

As the door opened he sprang forward, and at the same instant, as if to give him zest for his last struggle, there came to his ears from a distance the rush of hoofs and the cry of "Yankee cavalry!" waking the echoes of the silent streets. Was it Jimmy and Tim and his brave fellows? Had they swept into a garrison town, with all the odds against them, for his sake? The corporal and the guard seemed no more than men of straw with bayonets of paper in his way. In that second, when to dodge an inch too far might mean life or death, he had the confidence and the quickness of the cat. One man prepared for his onslaught was better than five men unprepared, who had only rifles, always clumsy at close quarters, for which he, himself, had the best of weapons.

The soldiers had expected to find a helpless being, and found a devil, who rushed at them with arm uplifted. He did not even give the corporal of the guard the honor of a blow, but felled him as his

THE VAGABOND

equilibrium was in the balance from the sudden halt of surprise. Before their rifles could be raised, he had struck the heads of the two nearest soldiers with two nervous blows, as if they were a pair of kettledrums. He seized hold of the rifle of the man behind and shoved its butt into his stomach as he whirled him around until he was actually between him and the only remaining one, who blew a cartridge into the ceiling. Still they were at the disadvantage of the unexpected, still the supreme idea of overcoming him dazed their minds, so that they had no wit to assist their force. They supposed that he would run away. It was the natural thing to do. Instead, he tripped the man nearest him and, throwing his whole weight against him as he did so, sent him sprawling back into the room. The corporal had struck his head when he fell, and lay stunned on the stone floor. The others were rising. The Vagabond jumped back, and swinging the great door to, bolted it.

All this had been done in the time that it took the sentry to reach the doorway and shout for help. And the sentry, too, came upon the unexpected, for the bayonet of the purloined rifle caught him as he sprang, his bullet flying over the Vagabond's head and ricochetting on down the corridor.

But beyond, in the open street that could be raked by rifle-fire, lay a greater danger than that which the prisoner had thwarted.

XLVI

TO LIE AND LIE WELL

Volilla was living on the opposite side of the street, only a stone's throw from the warehouse. She knew immediately of the Vagabond's arrest, and Marcus Aurelius, who had loitered about the town-hall during the trial, hastened to her with the verdict. She exhibited no surprise, for he had brought only the news of a foregone conclusion.

"For de Lawd Gord's sake, Missy Vo!" he cried. "Has dis yer war made yo' so hard-hearted dat yo' kin hyah dat ez ef twuz no mo' dan sendin' a fiel' han' t' jail? Yo'se gwine t' do some'n', ain' yo'? Yo' ain' gwine t' see 'im shot?"

"Why should I do anything for a Yankee spy?" she asked.

"'Cause he's jes' one o' de fines' men dat uver lived; 'cause he heart is de bes'es' heart a man could have, on'y he got a little screw loose in he head dat mek 'im t'ink niggers oughter be free. Who care 'bout dat little screw when he's got de bes'es' heart? 'Cause—'cause he loves yo'; he loves yo', an' yo' loves 'im!"

"I love him! I don't. How dare you speak to me in this way?"

"'Cause I'se yo' ole sarvant, dat goes whar yo' go,

THE VAGABOND

nuver mindin' de hunger or de wedder or de bullets. 'Cause yo' taught me t' tell de truf, Missy Vo."

"Then tell it, and don't be ridiculous."

"It's redick'lus fur yo' t' set dyah doin' nuttin'. He's redick'lus 'cause he lose all he senses when he see yo', he loves yo' so har'; 'cause de very sight o' yo' mek 'im dazed like when yo' bring a man out o' de dark into de sunlight."

Unconsciously he had explained the Vagabond's strange conduct in inviting recognition as he stood by the roadside. The realization of this now clutched her heart.

"He wan' 'countable nohow yistiddy. I know." And for the first time he told the story of the turquoise locket. "When he see dat piece o' writin', an' he t'ink how yo' kyared it nex' yo' heart, it's jes' ez ef he wake up out o' pu'gatory an' he wuz walkin' in a fiel' o' flowers all a-twinklin' wid honey dew. He keep right on walkin' an' nuver see no man wid a rifle a-hidin' in de flowers—yo' flowers, Missy Vo!"

"And you let him keep that locket, you, my servant! Are you in his pay?"

"Yes, ma'am, I is."

His blunt confession sunk all other considerations.

"You, Marcus!" she exclaimed. She could not comprehend such disloyalty. She could not believe the Vagabond guilty of such perfidy.

"In dis a-way I'se in he pay, jes' ez I'se in yo' pay—'cause I ain' gettin' no money frum no one. Dem dat considers pay in dis time ain' doin' what I'se been doin'—not fur nuttin'. I'se a trained sarvant wuk-kin' fur glory. My pay is de pleasure I gets in sarvin'

THE VAGABOND

a real lady or gent'man—all de pleasure ole Marcus got lef' in dis hyah worl' wid plenty o' promises an' no guarantee fur de nex'. Yo'se a lady; he's a gent'man. An' de grandes' pay I uver got from any gent'man I got from 'im when he wuz sick at Lanl'ton—he smile an' he manner! Money! If it's money I'se arfter, don' yo' s'pose one o' dem new-made Yankee gin'rals 'ud like a sarvant dat could teach 'em a little quality? Lawd! 'Cause I ain' no fool dem ab'lition-is' fo'ks would dress me up an' put me on de lechure stage to show how smart de niggers is. 'Fo' de Lawd Gord, if yo' won' do nuttin', de time has come fur Marcus t' desert an' git a mule an' ride 'way!"

He stiffened in dignity and started from the room.

"Stop, Marcus!" She laid her hand on his arm and patted it, while tears glistened in his devoted eyes. "I knew you would not be in anybody's pay. I was angry when I said that. I'm afraid I've been very neglectful. I never think of you. I take your loyalty for granted."

"It ain' yo' place t' t'ink o' me; it's my place t' t'ink o' yo'. Yo' been neglectful! Why, yo'se divided yo' las' biscuit wid me—like *he* would. Dat's it—yo' two, yo' two! De Lawd meant yo' fur each urr, an' in droppin' yo' out o' heaven de win' tuk 'im t' de urr side o' de Potomac."

"Yes, the other side of the Potomac. That is enough, even if I did love him. Love him! Why should I talk of that? I don't; of course I don't! I won't! As an act of mercy I will save him. I don't believe in executions. The General is too fond of them. A telegram to General Lee—the first favor I

THE VAGABOND

have ever asked of him—will get him reprieve; I know it will.”

“So ’twould, Missy Vo. I t’ought o’ dat. But de wire’s been cut dis evenin’.”

Then, indeed, she was all concern.

“You’re sure? No, it can’t be; it can’t be!” she cried. “Go! Be quick! Ask again if it won’t be up before morning. Go, quick!”

She sprang for the door and opened it for him, closed it slowly after he was out, and sank into a chair.

“Perhaps his own company cut the wire,” she thought. “There’s the horror of him: whatever I do for him, I do for the enemy! Yet I would not be a woman—I would not be human—if I did nothing. I cannot go to this General. A request from me would only excite his suspicion. He must know that it was I who first recognized the man. I—I was so certain that I could call on ‘Uncle Robert’! He has said so often that he would do anything I wished. I—I was so certain that I could telegraph, and—and I expected, of course, to save him again—only I hated to save him!”

Her head fell into her arms, and she sobbed—she knew not why. A knock at the door made her dry her eyes. She rose and opened it, to admit the Commandant himself.

“You probably heard that we captured a Yankee officer spying on our lines in Confederate uniform,” he announced, abruptly. He was always abrupt, more especially so since his own home in the Shenandoah Valley had been burned.

“Yes,” she said, disinterestedly. “Won’t you be

THE VAGABOND

seated, General—on the lounge? The chairs are all at the hospital.”

“Since the trial, I have learned what was not developed at the time—that you first called attention to the man. Afterward you said you were mistaken in your identification.”

“So I was.”

“Another peculiar coincidence is that he asked us to give you his sabre. Here is a note that accompanies it.” As he handed the folded paper, he regarded her keenly, if not suspiciously.

“A note and sabre for me! Are you sure?” Her amazement, even to the frown, was facile.

“Quite,” said the taciturn soldier.

“Probably the note will explain. It will be more soldierly, won’t it, to read that before I surmise?”

Whatever her feelings were, no expression flitted across her face, except that of anger and disgust. She knew that he would want to know what the condemned man had written. Likely this would put her in a dubious light, and the Vagabond under double guard. She must improvise, and improvise well! She must lie, and lie well!

“This is worthy of a contemptible Yankee!” she said. “The man put himself forward on the road. His face was like that of a regular officer I had known in Washington before the war. But that officer had a scar across the forehead, and this one had none; so I supposed that he was merely one of our own men who was trying to impose on a girl with familiarity. Would you like to know what the brute has written?”

“I intended to ask as much.”

“‘My Fair One,’” she pretended to read from the

THE VAGABOND

paper, "‘you did your part prettily. It pleases me quite to have won favor so readily. It would have been pleasant to have been imprisoned instead of shot. Maybe then you might have brought me books to read, and prison-life would not have been so dull. However, I’m to die in the morning, says the court, and in honor of my last flirtation, please take this sabre from a devil of a fellow.’ ”

Her anger kept rising as she read, and with the last word she began tearing the paper in pieces.

"What insolence! Could anyone but a Yankee conceive it?" she cried, as she threw the bits of paper on the floor, with a gesture of disdain.

A smile felt its way outward from the General’s lips in unfrequented paths.

"A splendid soldier’s foibles may be forgiven," he said. "His courage and ability alone count. He smiled when I sentenced him to be shot; he could be gay and gallant in his kind of a way in the face of death. I would keep the sabre, if I were you. It is all the same whether it’s the household cavalry of Louis, with their laces fluttering, as if dying were a posture in a dance, or the Puritans, singing hymns as they charged: the trophy of a brave man is worth having. Good-night, Miss Lanley." And he stalked out, leaving her alone with the sputtering candle and her falsehood.

"Oh, that I should have to act like that for the sake of a Yankee captain!" was her angry thought.

She looked at the scattered note as if she would try to patch together the pieces. But what need? The original—the horror of it and, yes, the tribute of it—was written on her brain. She felt that she

THE VAGABOND

could repeat it, word for word, and wished that she might forget it all. Her glance fell on the sabre, which the General had left on the table, a service-weapon with a leather wrist-cord instead of gilt braid and a tassel. She put her hand on the hilt which his had so often clasped, and in a fit of abstraction slowly drew forth the blade. How easily it came; buoyantly, smilingly, as if a part of its owner! Not a spot marred its cold sheen. She ran her finger along the keen battle-edge. How often had it clove the flesh and drunk the blood of her people fighting for their liberty! She thrust the steel home, as if to blot out the picture it made, and picking up the terrible thing, took it to her bedroom, where she laid it in a closet softly as if she feared to waken it.

“‘May it remind you that my story is true, and may you think no evil of me,’” she quoted from the note. “He is against everything that I hold dear. He is to be shot in the morning! He asks nothing, expects nothing, of me. He only said good-by. I—” Her words were cut short by the entrance of Marcus.

“It’s no use. De telegraph’s done broke an’ it can’t be fixed to-night.”

“Then — we — must — help — him — to — escape!” she said, slowly.

“Yessum, an’ we kin—we kin!”

He bent his white head close to hers and whispered his plan—two plans, at once dependent and independent.

“But that might mean killing—killing our own soldiers! It is helping the enemy!” she cried.

“I reckon dat de chance is bes’es’ fur killin’ de Yan-

THE VAGABOND

kees. Killin'? Ain' dis hyah a war? Ain' a war fur mekin' fights? Is dis hyah gar'son afeerd o' a parecel o' Sheridan's house-bu'ners?"

"Go! go, Marcus! How I shall expiate this new offence against my country, I can't tell; but go you must! Tell him you did it. Tell him I would do nothing. Then he'll have no temptation to come again!"

"Jes' yo' trus' me! Nobody's gwine t' pay any 'tention t' a wuthless ole nigger!" And, the cunning contraband again, he slouched away, rubbing his hands at the prospect of adventure.

To her fell the more trying part—that of waiting. She drew the lounge near the window that overlooked the warehouse, and lay down for a sleepless night. If Marcus failed and dawn showed the Vagabond passing out under guard to his death! What should she do then?

XLVII

JIMMY RECONSIDERS

With the first glimmer of light, her straining eyes saw the corporal's guard enter the warehouse, and her heart sank, only to leap when she heard the pounding thrum of hoofs on the bridge leading into the town. If the first part of Marcus's plan had failed, might not the guard with their prisoner run into the arms of the Yankee cavalry, which would pluck their leader out of the jaws of death and pass on?

"He will be saved!"

The cry was one of tear-brimming joy and relief, arrested in her throat by the sight of him, bar in hand, stepping alone out of the warehouse door, while a bullet overhead knocked a spit of dust out of the stone. She thought now that he would be shot by the soldiers rushing to arms, before rescue could come, and she dashed out of the room and down the stairs, repeating, in her frenzy, "His horse! His horse, Marcus!"

The Vagabond himself, as he emerged, saw, suspended in their action, as if snapped by a camera's shutter, a platoon coming into the main street, and beyond them his own Vagabonds' naked blades greeting the sun of dawn in their charge. Did they know where he was, or had they merely come on a haphazard quest? He had a fear that they would sweep

THE VAGABOND

by without seeing him; while, with the instinct of the veteran, he looked quickly in the opposite direction, to make sure of every condition. A few yards away, by the gate of a wooden wall of some compound or other—could he mistake the white foot, the broad buttocks, the graceful head? It was Breaker, his Breaker! Dropped out of the skies? Come on wings ahead of his column? It did not matter. He was there, his empty saddle calling! As, disdaining the help of a stirrup, the Vagabond bounded to place, he saw a black, wrinkled hand withdraw from the reins, the door of the wall was closed with a bang, and from behind it Marcus Aurelius's voice mumbled in rebuke:

“Dyah, yo’ fool of a sowger! Yo’s’e out o’ trubble ag’in!”

The Vagabond whirled Breaker in his tracks in time to see the platoon’s formation broken into parts by the charge of his men—his own men—whose speed slackened as they approached the warehouse. Swinging the iron bar over his head in place of his sabre, he hastened toward them. Between shouts he could hear in the distance another roar of hoofs and everywhere the hurrying footsteps from the barracks and the lines toward the centre of strife. In a minute they would be the focus of a field of bayonets and the target of a raking fire from all directions. Jimmy Pool, his unbooted, unstirruped, swollen foot in its sock hanging limp, no sooner sang out a recognition than he passed the order for the troop to continue its pace, and the Vagabond, turning Breaker a second time, was elbow to elbow with his first lieutenant; while from the rear, above the pounding of hoofs and

THE VAGABOND

the rattle of musketry, came the mighty voice of Tim Booker:

"We don't care a whooping damn what happens now!"

"The General doesn't know I'm here," said Jimmy. "He's moving along the James Canal. Expects us to join him to-day. Southbridge has come up from Lynchburg with five or six hundred fresh horses, just off their winter forage. Saw him on the road not a quarter of a mile back. River's a torrent. We'll be hemmed in on all sides. You can't afford to be taken; we can, being only prisoners, at the worst. Soon's we get out into the country, you've got to use the first cover to separate from us and try a disguise."

"Jimmy! Have we been together for four years—and you ask me to do that?"

"No. I beg your pardon." And Jimmy was very contrite, as he well might be, considering his own standard of chivalry.

"The trouble is, we are going in the wrong direction," said the Vagabond, directly, and he cried the charge a halt.

Jimmy looked at him in blank amazement, while the troopers bounced into the air with the abrupt jolt as they heard the further order to face about. They had just reached the edge of the town. The main street through which they had ridden was filling with the soldiery that had poured into it upon the general alarm.

"Southbridge will come up with his full force as fast as he can go, his sash and plume a-flying. I know Southbridge. He doesn't lift his nose from a scent." The men were in form now, leaning over

THE VAGABOND

their horses' manes to minimize the danger of the rifle-fire. "Sound the call to boots and saddles!" said the Vagabond to the bugler. Without being misunderstood he could not have the charge sounded twice, which would have better expressed his purpose of informing the Confederates of his intention.

"Boots and saddles! When we've been in 'em for days!" said a trooper, who expressed the utter astonishment of all.

"I want to give them time to receive us properly," added the Vagabond.

Had the Captain's mind been touched by his terrible experience? Had he sunk his love of his men in his own vanity? Because death was certain with him, had he concluded that they must die with him? What sane being could contemplate tossing a hundred horse in column of fours against five or six hundred infantry, after giving them time and warning? It was throwing eggs against a rock. Jimmy was on the point of calling for disobedience, but discipline was too strong with him. The men were gritting their teeth, feeling like pegs set up for murder, and yet their love for their leader was too great, if not their confidence in his wisdom, to make them speak the fears of their hearts. They were ready to go to their death without seeing any reason for it, and the appreciation of this admiration and trust was the most glorious moment of the Vagabond's career as a soldier, far outstripping that of the charge. Tim Booker, the complaining, had not once raised his voice. No; he was running his thumb along the edge of his sabre in a preoccupied manner. He had given up all hope of the eternal hills of California and become as sin-

THE VAGABOND

ister as the devil himself in preparing for his last ride.

The General, hastening barefooted and coatless from his bed, had placed with masterly rapidity a row of bayonets six deep across the road and stretched two or three companies facing one another along the buildings on both sides in front of this. He comprehended admiringly that this mad cavalry-man was taking the small chance of getting back to Sheridan against the heavy odds of death; that he preferred selling his life dearly; preferred falling in action to capture and certain execution. His adversary could almost imagine the grim commander smiling as he presented his blade-studded torso of steel and the long arms of rifle-fire for murderous embrace.

Jimmy put his hand on his leader's arm and looked at him tragically. "Billy! Billy!" he said, plaintively.

Beyond the infantry appeared, now in increasing size like an approaching locomotive, Southbridge's force, whose coming was unknown to their compatriots.

"Tricking policemen!" said the Vagabond to himself, as he rose in his stirrups, turned to his men, and called with all the strength of his lungs:

"Observe that cross street, just this side of the Reception Committee! As you come to it, turn by fours to the right and left and meet on the main road at the bridge!"

"Oh! Of course!" gasped Jimmy.

As they broke into the charge, they saw an officer spring out of the infantry's mass with arms uplifted toward Southbridge's cavalry. As they swung into

THE VAGABOND

the side streets, their last glimpse was of the lurching mass of horses and men, while a few of the infantry were firing or springing forward toward the cloud of dust that the dividing column had left behind as a mantle for its fallen. Both the General and Southbridge must have understood instantly the turn was made the meaning of it. The Vagabond expected as much. He counted upon the time required for the enemy to carry out the simple order needful to trap him to bring him beyond immediate reach. A lieutenant in Southbridge's rear was the first to respond to the General's call. As he charged down an alley, Jimmy Pool saw him coming and cried the warning, and as he emerged the sabre of the last man in Jimmy's party cut off his head as if it were a poppy's. It was a valuable head, in that its loss made the party that it led stop for reinforcements.

When the two divisions of the Vagabonds met, with a shout of tribute to their leader, on the main road which the Vagabond had tramped as a prisoner the evening before, he felt nothing of the elation of victory. They were far from safe yet; rather, in the position of a fox who has escaped being knocked on the head to give the hounds a quarry. Tim and Jimmy voicing their praise, the Vagabond only said:

"Tricking policemen! Don't slacken speed!" Then he asked: "The horses have had no rations since last night?"

"No."

"And Southbridge is fresh! He ought to outride us in a long run!"

"I fear so!"

THE VAGABOND

"And the nearest direct line to Sheridan is to the northeast."

"But the river—the current won't let us cross it!"

"We must. The pontoons were removed when our brigade fell back, I suppose?"

"Of course," Jimmy replied. "All I'd been thinking of was to save your neck. We expected to be taken."

Before this, Southbridge had brought his superior force together. As the Federals turned off the road they saw their pursuers approaching at a gallop.

"How I'd like to wait for them!" the Vagabond fairly groaned. "I would, too, if they weren't five times as many as we are, with infantry back of 'em. Four miles to the river—it's at least that! Hm-m! We must make it!"

Their horses sank deep in the mire and their best effort was little more than a slow trot. Southbridge seemed to be going at double their speed, the while he remained on the road; but when he, too, tried the field with the Federals' tracks for his path, he slackened. Still, with the urgings of shout and spur, he was gaining. Every trooper saw that over his shoulder, and marvelled what resource of their leader should save them this time. He gave no sign and uttered no word, except to turn his head and, in his cheerful way, to say that they were going fast enough. He did not want winded horses for the crisis.

Then his keen eye saw a stretch of rising ground nearly in the form of a semicircle enclosing a swamp deeper than that of the immediate region. On the strength of his knowledge of his adversary, he swerved his course, and Southbridge, attempting to profit by

THE VAGABOND

the folly of not taking a straight line of flight, tried the cut-off, with the result that he fell into a morass and some of his troopers were unhorsed, while the Vagabonds actually increased the distance between them and their pursuers.

But the new gap became less and less until it was no more than five hundred yards, when the Vagabond saw the muddy, boiling surface of the swollen river. By the fringe of half-submerged willows along its bank, he judged its course and made for a bend where his instinct for topography told him that the current would carry a swimmer to the other side. Then he whispered his spirit into Breaker's ears; then every man of his command drove his steed to the utmost, and the energy which they had reserved actually widened the breach, promising them the time which they needed in order not to be so many helpless targets while they crossed.

No one asked himself whether it was possible to stem that torrent and reach the other side; whether they should not be whirled around like leaves in an eddy, some drowning, some thrown helpless on the bank, prisoners for the taking. Horses as well as riders felt the pressure of flight. They sprang in after their leader and they were caught and carried on, but toward the other side, until, with lashings by some and coaxing words by others, hoofs touched earth and dripping flanks broke clear of the water and dashed through the bushes and under their cover with the first sprinkle of bullets from the enemy about their ears. The Vagabond had no doubt that whatever courage or strength could do, Southbridge would. He knew that the pursuers would overtake him before he

THE VAGABOND

could reach Sheridan if they were allowed to cross. Sending the men with the weakest horses on, he retained the others, who, knee-deep in the overflow, and poking their rifles through the willows, saw Southbridge himself about to enter the water. He was swinging his sabre.

"That'll help his horse swim!" piped a waggish trooper, "that and his plume! And oh, mother dear! he's going to get his pretty sash all muddy!"

"Wait! Wait until they are well in!" the Vagabond said. "And don't hit their leader if you can help it," for he had suddenly a kindly feeling as well as one of admiration for Southbridge—a gallant consideration that amounted to the opinion that here was too good a man to owe his death to his houndish indiscretion and lack of forethought. Besides, he was grateful to Southbridge; grateful that he was not the same type of man as Richard Bulwer, or a score of other Confederates whose acumen had met his own with equally keen edge and skill and more than once outwitted him.

Mercilessly, as war commands in the name of mercy, they dropped the struggling riders into the water until not half a dozen remained. These, with their cursing leader, were borne down-stream and finally to their own bank, where the rest of the force had fallen back to the cover of the willows and begun firing, but not until the rear-guard of the Vagabonds was departing at the run. Undaunted, Southbridge gathered his men and entered the water. This time he succeeded in crossing; and he pursued the Vagabonds until they were in sight of the columns of smoke from the timbers of the locks of the James

THE VAGABOND

Canal, and a cavalry patrol was blue—oh, such a bright, cheerful blue to those Yankees, who slowed their blown horses and sighed from happiness. But there was no sign of elation on the Vagabond's own face.

"Old Marcus! Do you think they suspect him?" he asked, in a manner which showed what thought had been uppermost from the beginning.

"No; not the least bit," Jimmy declared. "No white man could suspect a black man of such intelligence. He said to tell you his mistress would do nothing."

"Not a plumb d—n thing!" said Tim Booker, fiercely, as much as to say, "Now will you give up that girl?"

"Nothing!" the Vagabond repeated. He leaned over and patted Breaker's moist neck softly. "Tricking policemen!" he added, abruptly.

Then he smiled again, as he saluted the commander of the patrol.

XLVIII

MARCUS, THE STRATEGIST

Tim Booker's secret ambition throughout the war had been to have some individual experiences actually as outlandish as those his imagination conceived. This chance came when Sheridan called upon the Vagabonds for a volunteer to take a message through to Grant.

"They wouldn't send you on an errand like this, Jimmy Pool," said Tim. "It takes a talker to get through the Confederate lines." And in a suit of jeans, with his pockets full of coffee for bribes, he set out. The prospect of the yarns he could tell on his journey and on his return made him oblivious of the risk he was taking. Were he to fall he was determined that it should be with a twinkle in his eye and an artistic whopper on his lips.

"Soon—very soon! Soon—very soon!" ran the cadence of the mud-larks after they were ready to move, and they rode over the sodden and devastated land back to Petersburg in that memorable time when the fierce, red-bearded man had all but finished his long march through the heart of the Confederacy and the Army of the Potomac waited on the cavalry's coming to begin the movement that was to end the war. Even a trooper of '65 was not such a tireless

THE VAGABOND

machine that he did not need oiling and occasional repairs. Where, in '62, a month for preparation would have been expected, all that the little Irishman asked was time to reshoe the horses and replace equipment and a night's unprovoked sleep for his men.

Tim Booker, his mission having been amazingly successful, nevertheless met his fellow Vagabonds with a feeling of shame.

"I'm not to blame," he declared, almost piteously. "It's that confounded Confederate river. Before I'd seen anybody except negroes and old people I was taken up with the idea of riding. Yes, I, who have seen the world and the eternal hills of California, when I saw a boat somebody wasn't using I got into it and then and there destroyed all my chances of adventure. I broke an oar, I smashed the bow on a log, and jumped on a floating stump. And there I was on that stump, as helpless to show that I was cut out for chivalrous deeds as a clerk on a high stool. On both sides of that stream was plain infantry, and awful tired infantry at that; but the current must have had Jeb Stuart's soul in it, the way it charged. I couldn't steer that stump. Where it went, I went. I passed Confederates, lots of them, and when they asked me where I was going, I yelled back that I was marching to the sea, or finding a new way of breaking the blockade. Yes, those were the only answers I could invent. The nervousness of my position sort of dulled my brain. I kept hoping the stump would get caught on a root at a bend, and I'd still have a chance to show the metal I was made of. If it did, it pushed off in an ugly kind of way, like a woman that's had her gown stepped on. It would do that,

THE VAGABOND

and give me another ducking every time I got dried a bit. The water was cold and the wind colder. There I sat munching the coffee-beans—O Lord! what stories I was going to tell the Johnnies of how I got 'em out of a Yankee general's mess—yes, there I sat for twelve hours, till I was landed in the Union lines F. O. B. Why, a silent man, if he'd had that stump, could have done the thing as well as I."

The interval of rest gave the Vagabond an opportunity which months of rigorous campaigning had denied him. He took the first train for Lanleyton. As he turned from the road into the drive, he stopped and looked long and steadily at the creation which had made him realize the joy of possessing money—that is, the joy of spending it on another. In every detail of outward construction the new house was a counterpart of the old; yet nothing could replace the sobriety of age which even fresh paint on a wooden surface cannot entirely conceal. Felicia, who had little dreamed that she would ever take charge of any white-pillared mansion but her own, had found the work the happiest of her life—if we except, of course, the nursing of a private of cavalry whose clay pipe had once offended her.

"I've worn out your letters studying their directions," she said, when he had reassured her of her husband's health, "and I hope I've got things something like you wanted them."

"Oh, it wouldn't have been possible at all except for you, aunt. You have done so much for me, and I was only a saucy, impudent little beggar that wouldn't believe in you at all at first. All my friends have

THE VAGABOND

been so kind and loyal that sometimes I think I'm quite spoiled."

"I don't know of anybody who will stand spoiling so well, except the Judge—the General, I mean." (When she came to this subject, she lost sight of others.) "Billy, do you think I ought to call him the Judge or the General?"

"Whichever you like better."

"I think I like the General better—while the war lasts, at any rate. There! I'm not going to talk about him every minute, if I do think about him every minute. Oh, I've had a tussle with these negroes! All they do is to sing Miss Vo's praises. There are times when I think that the only thing is to thrash them; but they say she never did that. She had her own way of punishing them by appeals to their shame and pride. How I do admire her—the way she accepted her responsibility without preaching about it, as John—the General, says. If you have any suggestions, or want any changes, don't hesitate to say so, will you?"

"The curbstone was a little farther to the left, and there used to be a big rattan settee here on the porch. Jackson (a utility man that he had employed to assist her) can get one. I'll make some notes of orders for him to fill."

When he entered the drawing-room, he felt a shock which, for his aunt's sake, he tried to conceal. Its resemblance seemed only to make it more unlike that of his memory. The old furniture could not be reproduced, only replaced, he warned himself as preparation for the rest of the interior.

"Excellent!" he said, sincerely; for it was, consid-

THE VAGABOND

ering. Then he rearranged some of the chairs deftly, recollection or instinct prompting him to put two before the fireplace. "There was a little cabinet by that window. They kept one of her grandfather's decorations and some medals and other heirlooms in it. Of course, that was burned, but possibly they had taken their treasures elsewhere. We'll have Jackson get another cabinet. There was a low Chippendale chair, where she used to sit sometimes when she was reading or sewing. We must have a chair like it—like the one which she was occupying that night when a wounded Federal fell across the threshold into her arms."

So they went from room to room, he praising Felicia's kindness and taste, and making suggestions gently, with pathetic touches of description, explaining the associations when new articles were to be bought, unconscious of the secret which his manner and his words were betraying. When they stood on the porch and he was ready to go, she said, tenderly:

"You love her, Billy."

"I—I have money and I have a fancy—you know my weakness for fancies—and I want to repay her for saving my life, and make such reparation as dollars can for what my country has destroyed. She is not to know that I built it. Remember, it's an old class-mate of her father's. I—I"—then he looked at her pleadingly and cried: "Don't! Please, don't!"

Riding away, he wondered if, after all, he had not done a clumsy thing; if this new Lanleyton—overly new—would only make the loss of the old harder for her to bear.

THE VAGABOND

From the moment of hearing that she would do nothing to rescue him, he had felt as he had when he was seven days from camp with only one day's rations left. What a mockery was gold without food! What a mockery was love such as his when its object would not transcend sectional hatred to save his life! In his despondency he was stupid, so stupid that it had not once occurred to him that by sending his sabre to her he had made open action by her on his behalf impossible. Its loss was another thing that set heavily on his heart. He had come to look upon it as the fourth of his loyal familiars, ranking after Tim, Jimmy, and Breaker. Had she given it to some Confederate trooper? or had she kept it as a souvenir to amuse Confederate officers? No; he still believed in her too much to think her capable of that.

The note that he had written to her distressed him most. His rescue had given it the bathos of the death-bed heroics of a puppy recruit who thought that he was dying, only to find himself classed by the surgeon among the "not serious." Over-exertion contributed to a distorted view which the thoughts of the new Lanleyton had begotten. He felt that he had only three things to be thankful for, his friends and his good horse and the certainty that great activity was near at hand. He half wished that the war might last while he lasted. He now dreaded the time when it should be over; when under the impulsion of his promise and his passion he should once more seek her out. Even "I shall wait! I shall hope!" became a mockery; and "I shall love you forever" had the flavor of bitterness which only truth and ashes can give.

That night he had two hours' sleep. The next day

THE VAGABOND

he was a part of the final campaign of the Civil War, which was the very apotheosis of the cavalry's skill and versatility and of the personality of the little Irishman who, as in primitive days before repeating rifles and great combinations, could change the face of battle by his presence. The infantry-man's cry of "Who ever saw a dead cavalry-man?" that rose about every horseman at the beginning of the war, was not heard from the numerous soldiery which held thirty miles of works and all winter had scowled at an enemy from two to five hundred yards away. Instead, they shouted their plaudits for the bully boys who had made good all their promises.

They needed no telling to know what Sheridan's object was. He was going to make a turning movement on the extreme left, while they who had waited so long were still to hug the enemy's line as if it were a beggar's crust of bread, and wherever Uncle Robert gave ground to snap up the advantage and greedily maintain it. The Vagabond had a moment's talk in passing with his uncle, a hand-grasp with that great corps commander, Husted "the Superb," as his men called him, whose fame every defeat and every victory brightened. So often in the first year of the war had the soldiers of the Army of the Potomac talked of entering Richmond, so far had Richmond seemed in the second, so much farther in the third, that, the great hope on the point of fulfilment, from superstitious awe they almost feared to speak their belief.

The deserters continually slipping across the narrow zone that separated the armies all told the same story—of a lost cause. It was as plain to the teamster as to Grant that when the rains had ceased, whenartil-

THE VAGABOND

lery and wagons could be moved, Richmond must be abandoned; and, to Grant, at least, it was plain that this consummation was near at hand; that an arm of human flesh and horse-flesh must be thrown across the path of the retreat and prevent the union of Lee's and Johnston's forces. That arm was Sheridan, and the Vagabond's company happened to be one of the fingers feeling the way before they should fall back on the palm and the knuckles shoot forward for the last killing blow, in the battle of Five Forks, where desperation ran high on both sides and the men received and gave fire as if bullets were sugar pellets. This was the Confederates' final effort to cut their way out, the swan song of four years' struggle. They expected defeat, and made the cost as great as they could. Death was counted a kindly messenger snatching them from the picture of their rifles stacked in a conqueror's camp.

But the Federals were not thinking of the glory of that approaching hour and the superfluous function—such is the nature of soldiers drawn from farm and shop by principle and then tempered by rough practice. They were thinking that they might be home for the spring ploughing, or back at the forge before the honeysuckle on the village porches was in bloom. They were thinking of the long life stretching before them, with the memory of gallant deeds to give graceful passage of time; and in the enthusiasm of the picture they faced death with more abandon than ever before. The very nearness of peace gave them the strength for the final thrust which should bring a sorry business to an end. The sweetheart under the rose-bush, the child (born in its

THE VAGABOND

father's absence) on the knee, or the grave—and quick!

Sometimes the harder won that realization is, the more it belies florid anticipation. When the blue ants swarmed from their hills over the unoccupied breastworks which had bristled with death a few hours before, they were not plunged at all into the frolicking triumph which they had promised themselves in the fatuous days before the first Bull Run, and even in the Peninsula. The fact itself was too deep a triumph to need banners or red fire. A riot of joy would have been out of place now; making sport of a brother's grief, or the grief of an enemy whose virtues, by dint of bloodshed, had made him once more kin. They marched on in chase of the shattered Confederacy, which, with the path to Johnston closed, kept on moving and striking back, not spitefully, but fitfully, as a matter of course, leaving dead men, tired men, sick men, and the débris of war in its wake, until, at Appomattox, Grant wrote out the simple, eloquent terms of surrender, and Lee signed them, and rode back to his broken army, which paid him the greatest tribute a soldier of that war received by cheering him as heartily with the last breath of State sovereignty as it had in the dawn of the struggle with the lusty voice of the stored energy of long peace and the promise of separate nationality.

The Vagabond's company had seen the first white flag raised, and lowered their carbines, knowing that they had fired their last shot. With the vanguard he had ridden into the field of gray and butternut rags that covered hearts as noble in failure as they were brave in battle, with sabres that had cut flesh and

THE VAGABOND

parried steel sheathed in harmony, not to be drawn again except in a common cause. Whoever had felt any malice lost it in the hand-grasp of a foe who did not sulk over the inevitable. His men chatted with Stuart's men as if they had risen from the whist-table instead of from four years' carnage. His own talk was absently given, for the war was over in a double sense for him. Personally, the realization was ashes where the anticipation had been flame. That which he had waited for, now that he had it, seemed air in his grasp. The great day at hand, he had not the courage to doubt her answer. He concluded that he would not return to California. Tim and Jimmy should have that vanity, his mine, and he would sever himself from the association that it must ever call to mind, and turn his face to new ledges and follow his vagabondish fancy wherever it called, letting to-morrow take care of itself and burying yesterdays in the change and excitement of to-day. No! He would not torture himself again with the sight of her. He would not have the last treasured glimpse that of disdain; rather let it be that of her smile as they had parted after her impulse had carried her along the road in his company; or of her face transfixed with purpose when she denied his identity in order to save his life.

While his thoughts in the midst of rejoicing ran thus, his friends, who had known little of the truth, who had thought of this girl as the cause of his escapades, for his sake, as they understood it, were withholding a secret that would have made hope mount in song to his temples. A glimpse of a black face going in and out among the holiday crowd of

THE VAGABOND

soldiery made him oblivious of all save one idea. If Marcus Aurelius were here, then his mistress must be also. Never had the Vagabond seen him looking so miserable and flustered. Never had he seen in his eyes before the latent savagery of Africa; for the old man was in a tempest of rage and dismay.

"Yo'se de man I'se been lookin' fur in dis hyah mess o' foolishness. Now's yo' chance, an' yo' ain' got any time t' lose. 'Fo' Gord, I'se shivered an' lied; I'se been sassed by fiel'-han's; I'se rid a mule tell I wuz raw; I'se brekfusted on faith, dined on hope, an' supped on char'ty, an' slep' in a mud-hole or hang-in' t' a peg, an' I'se been glad t' do it—dat's a sarvant's duty. I'se been glad t' do it, seh, 'slong's de white fo'ks play dyah part. I'se stuck t' my missus frough de war, but I'll nuver do it now, nuver, nuver, nuver!" he protested, vigorously, as if reassuring himself. "She done gwine wid Marse Soufbridge. He's not give up. He's gwine 'way t' Mexico an' heath'n countries t' keep on fightin' fur fightin's sake. He's a-ridin' Folly, an' she's in a ole ker'ige—dey's out dyah on de road a-gwine t' perdition!

"'Fo' Gord, don' blame me! I'se done all a sarvunt could. 'Look hyah,' says I, 'we ain' licked; no, seh'—an' we ain', Mistah Yankee (this to the Vagabond). 'How can we be licked when Marse Robert come rid-in' back from dat are meetin' wid dat man Grant a-lookin' jes' ez cahm ez uver, jes' ez ef he won?' No, seh, yo' can n' lick Marse Robert. He jes' stop dis war 'cause he t'ink de foolishness gwine far nuff an' 'cause he show de Yanks dat one Confed'rate can lick th'ee Yanks an' de trubble is he can n' quite lick fo'. 'An', Missy,' I says, 'Marcus he done he duty; yo' do

THE VAGABOND

yo'se. Yo' duty's t' go back t' Lanleyton an' buil' a new house an' look arfter de fool niggers dat's foolish-er'n uver now dey's got dyah heads full o' Yankee notions. De Yankees can n' tek yo' lan' 'way from yo'. Dat's property, an' property's property. It's yo' ancestahs' property; it's yo' duty.' And she says, 'Dyah ain' no mo' Lanleyton; dyah ain' no mo' Firginia. I'm an outcas' who goes whither de win' bloweth.' "

"But the house can be rebuilt," suggested the Vagabond, knowing that Marcus would know if his mistress had heard of the new one.

The old man's manner quite disabused him on that score.

"I tell her dat. 'Fo' Gord, I don' t'ink she's in her right min'. I tell her she an' I mus' part ef she's gwine t' be so foolish, an' she say, 'Go, Marcus; yo'se free; dyah's no reason why yo' should stay. Yo' frien's, de Yankees, mek yo' free.' Dat mos' mek me melt; but my duty sen' me hyah. Now's yo' chance, yo' las' chance. Yo' go t' her an' maybe, maybe yo' kin save her. Ef yo' don' go, she gwine do some'n' she al'ays be sorry fur, 'cause she's jes' all flustahed out her senses. She a-gwine t' marry dat are man Soufbridge 'cause he fit on her side, an' 'cause she done prumise him an ansah arfter de war. It's yo' las' chance. Yo' go t' her an' don' yo' mince mattahs an' say, 'By yo' will.'

"Yo'se a Yank, an' Soufbridge's a Confed'rate. 'Tain' dat; it's de man, an' yo'se my man. Yo' hit dat Soufbridge 'tween de eyes, an' den tek 'im down in de mud an' sit on 'im a while. 'Twill do 'im good; 'twill teach 'im dat when Marse Robert say de war's

THE VAGABOND

over, de fightin' time's over, too. Jes' a good thrash-in' t' tek 'im out o' de pouts. An' yo' jes' tu'n her ker'ige roun' an' tek her straight back t' Lanleyton, jes' ez ef yo' hed a right to, widout doin' any'ting 'cept t' smile—yo' knows how t' smile—'cept t' smile at her fool talk!"

"When—when she did nothing to save me! Marcus, you don't understand!" the Vagabond said.

"Nuttin' t' save yo'! Dat's what she made me tell fo'ks so yo' wouldn' do no mo' foolishness. Nuttin' t' save yo'! I tol' dem lieutenants dat *she* said t' say she done nuttin'. Dat's like fool sowgers! All dey knows is t' 'bey orders. Yo'd have t' wink like a barn-door a-op'nin' 'fo' dey'd tek a hint. Nuttin' t' save yo'! She did it all. Yo' fool note! Yo' los' yo' senses. 'Fo' de Lawd, dese white fo'ks—but I can n' go runnin' on in any mo' talk. Yo' let me have one o' yo' hawses. Yo' come 'long; come 'long!"

So they set off together.

XLIX

A CHOICE OF FUTURES

Having passed the main body of the Confederates, they proceeded at a rapid pace along the road Marcus had indicated.

"Dey ain' no time t' be los', 'cause dat are man Soufbridge mout get de fus' parson he fin' an' have it all over 'fo' Missy Vo blow col'. I don' know, I don' know. I 'spec dat I'll go wid her anyhow. She's all dat's lef' o' de fam'ly, an' I b'longs t' de fam'ly."

"Have you heard anything from Lanleyton lately?" The Vagabond's question was significant of the fear still running in his mind.

"Hyahed anyt'ing? Good Lawd, what is dyah t' hyah? Ev'yt'ing's bu'n' down. Yo' don' hyah anyt'ing from de middle o' de Dead Sea! I reckon not."

This reassurance left no doubt that she knew nothing of the new house; for more than ever he felt that if she were to be his, it must be for himself alone. His love must be returned with love as single-minded, else it were better that each go his way; and in that event a sense of indebtedness to him would be torture for her. No expedient, no bribe, no false persuasion, only one grand, enduring passion could justify the union of their natures; that for her sake as well as his; that in the name of his fancy, which preferred starvation to a morsel.

THE VAGABOND

This new condition of saving her from impetuous folly regardless of whether she was to be his or another's was a part with the surprises that had played havoc with all his plans where she was concerned. A Union officer going to propose to a Confederate girl whom he had met only once was more in keeping with the formalities than a Union officer going as a counsellor to reason with a Confederate girl whom defeat and care and hatred of his side had made reckless. Why should he interfere against Southbridge? Might she not love him after all? His only justifiable excuse for the journey was to save her from a man of violent passions and prejudices, who would lead her into strange lands and strange brawls and grief and misfortune; to assure her the time and rest required for clear judgment. But how? Whatever his advice, would not the sum of it be, in her ears, "You had better go back to your home which we burned, and your lands which we kindly devastated for you!" Was it within the range of feminine humility for her to listen to him at all? How complex this new duty beside the simple task he had set for himself through the grinding years of warfare, when this happy day of peace should come! If once a stare had tongue-tied him, why not now, with a better cause?

When, from the crest of a knoll, they saw a rickety carriage, with a man riding beside it, and he heard Marcus's delighted words of recognition whispered in his ear, he concluded that, above all, he was not so made as to shine as a counsellor of dour mien.

"Praise de Lawd! Yo'se got yo' head out o' de vinegar bar'l! I wuz worrited. Yo' an' her don' look right 'less yo' smile—an' she ain' smile fur months.

THE VAGABOND

Yo' jes' look at her, de way yo' can, yo' scrumptious devil of a Yankee, yo'!"

"Follow; I'll lead," the Vagabond said, riding on.

He felt already quite relieved, with all his pros and cons behind him. He was going into action; and action always blessed him with good-humor and self-possession.

Looking over his shoulder on hearing horsemen approach, Southbridge recognized his old enemy. They were on opposite sides of the road, Southbridge abreast of the carriage, the Vagabond twenty yards away.

"Good-morning!" said the new-comer, pleasantly; and the Confederate made no reply except a glare. All his hatred of this Yankee was wrapped up with his love of the woman whom he thought was now his. The Vagabond urged his horse forward until he could look under the tattered carriage-cover at her face. Her little cry of surprise was followed by the angry call: "Go back, or I'll shoot you dead!" and he looked up into the muzzle of Southbridge's revolver.

"I fought you once in the open and gave you back your sabre," the Vagabond returned. "A second time, I directed my men not to fire on you, as you were swimming a river. I have something to say to Miss Lanley. If you wish to kill me, go ahead!"

"No, no, Jefferson," she said, deprecatingly. "It is not worth while, really."

Southbridge lowered his weapon. The Vagabond moved forward till his spur touched the forward wheel of the carriage, which the driver had stopped. When again he glanced at Volilla he still had the fear of her power to silence him with a look or a word. Though her riding-habit was threadbare, she had that innate

THE VAGABOND

distinction of person which made her always seem well dressed; her adorable hair, arranged without a mirror, paid a compliment to her deft fingers which a lady's-maid might have envied. He saw in her eyes only the indifference and the pride of despair. She had been one who believed in the South's invincibility to the last moment. She was still dazed by the misfortune and overcome with the reaction from the long strain. Southbridge's offer to take her away from the heart-breaking scene of her country's undoing, and his words of contempt for surrendering as long as there was a rifle left and a mountain-fastness for a covert, had been sweet to her ears.

"I have come, you see, as I said I would when the war was over, but on a different basis than I expected," the Vagabond said. "I have come to find that perhaps I am not the only one who has made a journey on impulse."

There his sentence was cut short by the stinging blow of Southbridge's glove across the face. A red welt was rising on his cheek. He could feel his flesh quivering as it did when he was waiting under fire for orders to charge.

"The time for passion has passed. Please hear me out," he started to say, and then raised his hand in time to receive the second blow on its back.

"As you wish," he replied. "Not here, I hope." He nodded toward Volilla.

"Yonder," said Southbridge. "Behind that knoll."

"Not that! Oh, not that!"—but she saw how useless was her protest, by a glance at their flushed faces. Then she looked at the Vagabond alone. "Am I to be always under obligations to you? I must—I

THE VAGABOND

must ask a Yankee—please don't kill him! Please only disarm him!"

To one this meant that she was interested in the safety of the other alone. To the other it was a whirling dagger boring into the core of his pride.

"You can always command me," said the Vagabond. "While you wait, I ask you to think of your grandfather's, your father's, Richard Bulwer's, your aunt's opinion of what you are about to do."

Side by side, as if they were friends on a morning jaunt, the pair rode across the fields.

"Not with the horses, this time," said the Federal, as he threw his foot over the saddle. "I may do as I will with myself, but I have no right to endanger the life of one who has served me so well, now that peace is here. And yours? He, too, is no part of our quarrel."

"No. I had no idea of risking Folly," said the Confederate.

He dismounted and removed his coat and hat, while the Vagabond did the same. Then they unbuckled their belts and unsheathed their sabres. The harmony of their movements incidental to the swift and essential preparation seemed part of a rehearsed performance. But a sight of their faces would have destroyed any such illusion. Southbridge's was mottled with the purple of his anger and the distended veins flickered with the pounding of his heart. Reason against such a rage as his was like turning a siphon on a furnace. The man before him stood for the North which had beaten down the South as relentlessly, if as slowly, as the turning of a screw; stood for that moment ever burning in his memory when he had been disarmed

THE VAGABOND

in front of the Lanley house, and all the mockeries which hated lips had framed sang in his ears. Victory would wipe out the stain on his own escutcheon; it would atone for his country's defeat and send him forth to new fields of adventure with a boaster's confidence.

This time the Vagabond was not smiling. He was disgusted and bitter. All day his heart had been beating with good wishes for every boy in gray. He had gloried over the prospect of the return of hundreds of thousands of men to earning and building instead of spending and fighting. He had wished that his mine was large enough to give every idle one a place. It was well that he was tired of the business of killing his fellow-men; well, in order that he might have the courage to risk his own life and so allow his adversary to ride away to a wedding with the girl of his heart.

"This is not of my doing," he said, as they lifted their blades in salute in signal of readiness.

"No feints will avail you now!" Southbridge cried; and the Vagabond's heart, if not his set lips, answered: "I will not wait on that!"

This time he was not in the mood to play for his opening. He sprang to meet Southbridge's circling cut and the two sabres rang dully with the contact of edge against edge. Flashes and quivering gleams played above them as they moved around each other, striking more in desperation than in skill, neither offering to the other the chance of a thrust in their mad contest of strength and will. Every blow, had it not been parried, could have split the heads which were fenced in by the snapping lights from the steel.

THE VAGABOND

The Vagabond could see that the first shoots of grass were carpeting the knoll with green; the sky was a soft blue; near by was a peach-tree in blossom. He thought of his mountain, his mine, and the girl; of work yet to be done; of obstacles yet to be overcome; of the joy of living and doing. Of a sudden, full-winged illusion whispered to him that he was fighting for the place in her heart that he craved; of a sudden, his rain of blows became a torrent. The might of triumphant fancy, giving strength to a right arm, bore Southbridge to his knee and left him trembling with exhaustion and shame, his sabre once more his enemy's trophy. He reached for his revolver, as if he would do murder, and found his wrist in a vise.

"That is unworthy of you," said the Vagabond. "You have lost. You are weary—ill, perhaps—think what you are doing!"

"No—I—I did not mean to shoot."

The Vagabond gave back the sabre. He offered his hand; but Southbridge shook his head.

"I can't! I can't!"

"I'm sorry," said the Vagabond. "I'm sorry I had to disarm you."

"You've won," Southbridge rejoined, after he had put on his coat. "Please take her horse back. I'll—I'll cut across lots on foot."

"No, please. What does it count if I have won? Is that any argument? Let us return together, and continue the discussion where we left it off. She need not know which was beaten."

So they rode back as if they were friends returning from their jaunt, Southbridge with his head bowed, and the Vagabond looking straight ahead.

THE VAGABOND

"I knew that *you* would win—you always win! That's the horror of you!" Volilla said. "I—I knew there was no danger." But her white face belied her confidence.

"Have you considered?" the Vagabond asked.

"Yes. My duty has come to me in a flash, as it often does. I want you to understand—both to understand—that your brutal duel has nothing to do with my decision. Jefferson, the Yankees cannot take away our lands or our pride and our responsibilities. Our slaves, our old house-servants—they may be free, but I know they will not give us up. They need us! Virginia is ours! Lanleyton is mine! I am going back to it. Your duty, too, is to your people and your State. It is no time to think of what you propose."

"You are going back with him?" said Southbridge, steadily, nodding toward the Vagabond.

"Alone; with you, or with both. One cannot always choose his companions on a journey. I shall have to depend upon the enemy for transportation. They have everything. When I get to Lanleyton, though, that is my castle, and I can dispense with escorts. If an outbuilding remains, I can live in that. If not, then with the Bulwers. I shall try to meet the debts—I will stick to my guns. I will not give up Lanleyton!"

"Both!" Southbridge threw out the word with a full breath of disgust. Dismounting from Folly, he handed the reins to Marcus. "I bow the knee to no conqueror," he added. "I'm not going to throw in my lot with a subject race!"

"We are not conquerors. We——"

THE VAGABOND

"Worse!" cut in Southbridge. Then his old, florid politeness returned. He lifted his frayed hat with its bedraggled feather and swept the ground. Setting it back on his head, he bowed to the Vagabond.

"Good-morning!" he said, nonchalantly.

Up the road he strode, on his way to that career which ended in a Central American revolution.

L

BACK TO LANLEYTON

In silence both watched the stalwart figure, whose bearing seemed to express the nature of the man, until it was out of sight. Then, some strange diffidence would not permit him to look at her. He patted Breaker's neck, as he sought for words, while she relieved the awkward silence by saying, naturally:

"I'll ride Folly, driver. Put on my saddle," which lay on the box.

"You needn't step into the road. You can mount where you are," the Vagabond interposed. He pulled down the carriage-top and the driver swung Folly's flank against the wheel.

"A little dressing wouldn't be amiss, though this has the virtue of being fresh," and she stuck out the tip of a mud-covered boot. "I'll endeavor to be good-natured, if you'll only promise not to talk of the past." She smiled wanly. "There," pointing to the seat, "that's all the baggage I have. Your soldiers got the rest." He laid his hand on a long parcel done up in paper, and felt the curving brass of a sabre's guard through the wrapping. "As it's yours, you might as well keep it," she said, disinterestedly. "I really don't want a trophy that's been dipped in the blood of our—oh, pardon! We're not to think of the past. For my part, I must not, or I fear I would put the whip to Folly and fly from duty."

Thus, with her concluding words, she lamed and

THE VAGABOND

blinded the joy that her first gave him. On the point of opening the package, he desisted, and laid it across his saddle-horn, as if it were no more than a stick of wood and not his living blade. He wanted to ask her if she had received his note; he wanted, there and then, to open the flood-gates of his affection as he had planned. Her manner forbade. It was that of a woman in distress trying to be cheerful to a stranger, and nothing more.

"You will drive on as fast as you can, and overtake Colonel Southbridge," she said to the driver. "It was he who got the carriage, and he may need it. Certainly, he will need his saddle."

The driver nodded, and the old vehicle creaked, and began careening through the mud.

As they turned their horses' heads to the east, Marcus, who, fearing lest his presence should be prejudicial, had watched the progress of events from a distance, came riding toward them.

"Missy! Missy!" came chokingly from his lips, while the tears flowed. "Missy! Missy! I'd come! I'd come! I couldn't he'ped it!" he said, as he fell in behind them. "I'se so glad, so glad! Oh, Missy, Missy!"

Though within a few miles of the two armies, they had the road to themselves, except for straggling Confederates who had not waited on formality to start for home. When the Vagabond looked toward her, out of the tail of his eye, she was, on her part, looking straight ahead, seemingly as unconscious of his presence as he was conscious of hers.

"Folly is in marvellously good condition," he remarked, at length.

THE VAGABOND

"Yes. That's the one thing I've got to be thankful for. He's the greatest veteran of all." She patted his neck, and one ear wagged back and he champed his bits in return. "Your horse seems to have been equally fortunate."

"Oh, he's been on the winning side. He's had an easier time."

"But that's the war! Let us not start to talk of that, please," she rejoined; "please!" she repeated, almost abjectly.

"Pardon!"

Then silence, except for the plunk of the hoofs in mud and a mumbling from Marcus's lips:

"She's jes' a little da'k, an' he's fair an' he's all hones' all de way frough, an' she's all gentleness an' pride; an' he's jes' a ha'f a head taller'n her—my! dey's jes' de mos' scrumptious couple! Ef I can see 'em mek it up an' a new house built, an' I can op'n de dinin'-room doahs an' 'nounce dinnah like I did in de ole days, I'se ready t' drop dead, fur I'll be in heaven already."

The Vagabond continued to glance at her now and then to make sure of the reality. Her very presence seemed to fill the erstwhile empty cup of his spirits to brimming. All his fancies returned in the luxury of imagined fulfilment, even to the great house and the broad acres and "ours!"

"Peace means that I am going back to the mine," he said, as if she were truly interested in his affairs. "You can't imagine how much better I like that. Breaker here will be treated as if he were heir to a throne. I'm going to take all the good fellows in my company that haven't positions at home, out with me."

THE VAGABOND

I want to see every man of them doing well. There'll be many changes. Things haven't run just as they might while I was away. Once they're going well, we'll have to see Europe—Jimmy, Tim, and I, I mean—we can't take you, Breaker. You couldn't read the guide-books. Think of it! I'm twenty-five years old, and I have seen scarcely anything of the world."

"It is nice to have money," she replied, censoriously; "but there are other things."

"Yes, there is mercy, justice, goodness, health, beauty, happiness, and youth. Money means to me that I can see a new place. Money means that you can give happiness to someone whose happiness makes yours. It means duty. To the North, at this moment, it should mean that, above all things. We fought to make you stay in the family, and now we should help to rebuild your altars."

"There is plenty of sentiment in Boston, they say," she rejoined. "What a fine fire our house made! But we are coming back to the war. Is it fair for you to explain? Would you offer balm on the tip of the blade that made the wound? I—I'm not expected to say that, though."

"When our great President was at City Point less than a month ago, it seemed as if he had every reason for elation. The war was as good as over. His victory was won. He is the idol of the people. Yet everyone remarked how sad he was. He was not thinking of triumph. He was thinking of the cost in blood; of the greater work yet before him; of making the country whole again—'with malice toward none and charity for all.' "

THE VAGABOND

"Charity!" she repeated, her voice sounding like a distant bell. "Charity for Virginia!"

They reached the crest of a little hill, and before them, with Appomattox Court House for its centre, were the two armies. On the side toward them the field was the subdued tone of gray and butternut and the earth itself; the farther side was blue, and in the centre, the zone across which only death and prisoners had been exchanged had given place to a medley in common ecstasy over the end. She kept to his side, making no comment, let alone protest, as they threaded their way through the maze of the road, foot-soldiers and wagon-drivers making room for a beautiful woman who rode as grandly as Uncle Robert. When they came to the park of artillery and the long lines of stacked rifles, which were the only booty of a great war for a principle, he said:

"You must not look at that!"

But of course she did, womanlike. The sight of this outward show of defeat, to his surprise, did not seem to depress her. She drew rein and surveyed it from end to end with the first real smile on her face that he had seen for three years.

"This is all—all that your millions of Yankees have taken?" she said, mockingly, as she glanced up at him. "See how clean their rifles and guns are! Then look at them themselves! Bent old men and undeveloped boys, in their rags, unfed, never paid! Look at your men! Good shoes, good clothes, well fed and paid! It took so many of you to whip so few of us! I am very proud of my country! I would rather have lost all and served on this side than on yours. But come, Folly, we are on the war again."

THE VAGABOND

In the Union lines they heard the same talk as they had in the Confederate—of home and its concerns. There was little of the professional lingering over details of a regular force, with barrack life before them. Two great, skilful armies would melt away into industry, and where to-day were reveille and taps, to-morrow would be only the calls of individual will. The officers who had learned how to lead while in the heyday of youth were to take part in another and a greater conquest, the peaceful one of the material resources of an undivided country.

Wherever Volilla went there was a pathway of silence. "Shut up, boys! A lady!" the voices sang out in a warning, which the worst rowdy obeyed with a spirit he perhaps had never shown in saluting the commanding general himself. With caps in hand and bowed heads they waited for her to pass.

The Vagabond led her to the spot where his own company was resting.

"If you'll wait here," he said, "I'll see what can be done about hastening you on your journey."

In his absence, Tim Booker, turned gallant, arranged a chair out of saddles for her and insisted on swathing her skirts in blankets, which he did with a skill and confidence that was the envy of poor Jimmy Pool, who was helpless in the presence of any woman except his old mother. In this position she was served with a plate of soldiers' fare and coffee in a tin cup.

"Coffee! Coffee—real coffee!" she said; and smiled her thanks in a way that made Timothy ready to take orders from her for all time. "You see, the blockade kept it away from us. It is so good!"

"That's about the only mess we've got left. We

THE VAGABOND

gave the rest to Fitz Lee's men this morning. How in thunder the Johnnies kept on fighting without coffee beats me. Only way I can explain it is that they chewed enough tobacco to make up for it. Tobacco chewing's a bad habit, but it's done a lot for American courage in this war. I always put in a fresh cud when we started on a charge; kept it on my sabre-hand side, too. Once, when I didn't, I got into a peck of trouble. I'll tell you how it was."

Thereupon, this villain, his imagination flowing as fast as his tongue could bear the words, launched into a tale of how a small Confederate had outplayed him in every particular and he was rescued only by the arrival of the rest of the company.

"I'd like to see that little fellow just once more," Tim mused.

"Do you bear him malice?" she asked.

"Malice? Me? I want to shake his hand. He's just the kind of a man we need out at our mine. Good men are scarce. The best way to find 'em is in a fight, and we've found an army of 'em over there."

Jimmy Pool, who had been suffering in the background, now advanced. He did not know exactly what he ought to do, but, on consideration, he stiffened and saluted.

"Miss," he said, "that's right—right, hat and boots. We feel like it was a Thanksgiving dinner where we had patched up the family quarrel; and when the men that did the fighting feel that way, the rest of the country ought to. I hope you'll excuse us for not looking very trim, and not being shaved, or anything decent. If we'd known you were coming, we'd had boots and saddles, at any rate. I'm making an

THE VAGABOND

excuse for every man in the company. They all feel like me—a little embarrassed.”

Indeed, the men, instead of staring, had drawn away from the group, stroking their stubbly chins.

“You see, we’re going home, besides—and that seeming too good to be true makes us all a little uncertain of whether we are awake or dreaming,” Timothy continued. “My home is almost anywhere in sight of the eternal hills of California. The first time I ever saw the Sierras I took off my hat and said: ‘Tim Booker, you’ve found your everlasting earthly home, and the good Lord needn’t pass you on to Paradise with an intention of beautifying your surroundings.’ I didn’t expect that I would ever see them again, but I kept hoping I would just for the pleasure of it. It isn’t that we’ve won battles that makes us so happy, it’s the fact that we can be ourselves again.”

Meanwhile, the Vagabond, hastening toward the head-quarters of his brigade, came face to face with Richard Bulwer. Though his garments were threadbare, multi-patched, and lacking any insignia of rank, the Virginian still had that air of quiet distinction which nothing could efface. Without waiting on ceremony, the Vagabond seized his hand, and said:

“I’ve thought ever since that afternoon we met on the porch of Lanleyton that when the war was over you and I could be friends—that we understood each other. Some day you will see that this is your victory as much as ours, and possibly your glory even more than ours.”

“It isn’t far from Washington to Richmond, and

THE VAGABOND

it took you four years to make the journey," Bulwer replied. "That is some satisfaction in this trying hour. As I read the Constitution, it was the United States *are*. Now it is the United States *is* by the decision of a court from which there is no appeal—that of war. I hope that I may serve the undivided country, which still includes the land of my fathers, as faithfully as I served the Confederacy. There is work—so much work to be done!" Here he threw off all reserve and seemed to share the Vagabond's enthusiasm. "And there is no one whom I would rather meet than you. You stand for an idea which the war has made me appreciate. I have often thought of you and what you said of the fascination of taking wealth out of the hills and turning it to the good of the race and the honor of the country. My mother is always singing the praises of another side of your character, which is still more important. I am going to Lynchburg for her this afternoon. And when I have taken her and Volilla back to the plantation and we have bread on the table again, you must come and tell us more about California."

"Miss Lanley is here with my company. I—I am going to furnish her an escort to Lanleyton. I—I am going with her, myself, if she will permit me."

"There is no Lanleyton!" Bulwer exclaimed, with surprise.

"Yes, there is—or as good a substitute as can be made." The Vagabond explained.

"You are magnificent—magnificent! But—but that would make no difference with her."

"I knew it would not. I don't want it to—please understand me!"

THE VAGABOND

"Ah, I am the victor, after all. My battle is won. I know that the girl whom I met when I was on recruiting duty in Alabama is waiting for me. And you—I fear you will be the defeated one. Volilla cannot forgive the past, unless she is even deeper than I thought."

When the Vagabond returned to his company he brought the news that he had a month's leave.

"You can't reach Richmond to-night, but you can find accommodations on the way," he said to Volilla. "You can be in Richmond early to-morrow morning, and I've arranged for yourself, and also to put Folly on the train, so you'll be in Lanleyton before to-morrow night. Are you ready? Shall we go now?"

He sounded that "we" fearfully. It stood for his decision, which meant that he had succumbed to the temptation of being with her. She looked at him as if her eyes, if not her lips, were already framing a "No." Expecting to find Yankee soldiers gloating over her fallen countrymen, she had found a fellowship on equal terms. To this and to the diplomacy of the renowned Timothy Booker he owed her consent.

"It little matters how I get there, so that I get there as soon as possible;" for once on her own land, she felt that she would no longer be in the enemy's camp.

As they rode away, the men rose out of respect. One started to call for a cheer for their leader, but desisted, fearing that it would be indelicate, considering that she was a Confederate. Scarcely a word passed between the two for the rest of that afternoon. He feared, as before, to have any mocking reply break the spell of the enchantment of her presence. To him

THE VAGABOND

there was no material of war or soldiers by the wayside. He rode through a peaceful valley, walled with fruit and grain and verdure, the title thereto in her name, and her name his. Thus he dreamed while he might, with the horror of waking near, and Marcus keeping at a respectful distance, his brow corrugated with perplexity.

The houses of the village where they spent the night were full of wounded men. Upon the appearance of a lady, the occupants of a small room insisted that they were well enough to be moved, or to sit up, if there was no other place for her. A nurse, delicately considerate of an enemy's susceptibilities, and praising Confederate heroism, shared her quarters with the stranger. It seemed as if she were a welcome guest whose fame for good deeds had preceded her, instead of an enemy. Before she slept she still better understood the spirit of the Northern soldiers themselves toward their late adversaries. Contact had taken much of the bitterness out of her heart, which is stronger with the woman, who may only bear, than with the man, who can strike back, and, therefore, forgive the more readily when the conflict is over. She promised herself that she would try to take up her heavy burden without ill-will.

"Dawn was not too early for you formerly. I hope it is not now," said the Vagabond, when they were in the saddle again.

"It is not," she replied, casually.

Silence was again welcome; and while he was engrossed in his illusions, she was engrossed in thought.

Through the outskirts and then through the streets of stricken Richmond they passed without further ex-

THE VAGABOND

change of words. At the station, crowded with returning soldiers and incoming supplies, he left her with Marcus Aurelius while he had the horses entrained. In the car, she insisted in vain that the wounded officers should remain seated while she stood, for insistence meant that every place would be vacant. They knew by her voice that she was a Virginian, and they guessed that she was returning to some devastated plantation. She felt the mute expression of their sympathy by look and action. The Vagabond, grown pale, his lips tightly compressed, was wishing that two of the passengers might never arrive at their station.

When he assisted her to alight, and again when he assisted her to mount Folly, he could not have spoken if he would. His throat seemed in a vise, and his head was dizzy from his heart's fast beating. His ears were awaiting the ominous warning that she could go the rest of the way alone, which did not come. Her manner was as preoccupied as his, and he took silence for consent. Both stared into space, the horses choosing their own gait. Every step was marking off a second of the few minutes left to him. When they were so near that a dozen rods farther would show them the tops of the trees of Lanleyton, he made his cast.

"I love you! I love you! I cannot wait! I must know!" he cried.

Slowly she turned her face toward him. It was radiant with the smile that had been the Mecca of his fancy. She held out her hand. No words could be fraught with such grace as the confession of one whose battle against her affection had been its noblest justification.

THE VAGABOND

"There are some things a woman cannot help, dear," she said.

A hand-clasp! A hand-clasp, followed by the mightiest, most cherished silence of all, in which they tried to measure with young vision first scanning grandeur the heights of their joy. Dear! That word so well expresses nearness and possession. If dreamers they were by others' canons, the sweeter the greedily kept secret of that story which explained all. "Some things a woman cannot help!" And a man cannot help!

He had forgotten the surprise he had prepared for her until the white pillars of the new Lanleyton gleamed through the trees, as those of the old had on that day four years before when he had ridden forth with a story to tell.

"O—I—I!" she exclaimed. "I saw the ashes myself! How—how can it be?"

"A fairy worked while you were away."

"You! You—you!" She reached out her hand to his clasp again.

"A rough soldier fairy, dear," he added.

There was nothing more to say then, her heart being too full of happiness, her eyes too full of all the familiar surroundings, as they rode on along the road and up the drive (where they saw Felicia on the porch beaming over a telegram that announced the Judge safe and well). When she alighted it was in his arms. Her fingers were running through his hair, his lips were kissing her tear-wet lids.

"You did all this for me—for me, in the face of everything!" she said, in that abandon of a nature which is prodigal of riches to a single soul alone.

THE VAGABOND

"You did not let me know about the house. You asked me before I knew. You wanted me for myself alone! You have always loved me! I have always been the only one! It is too good, too good! How I fought against you! I used to stuff my ears at night to keep out the sound of your voice telling your story. I loved you first then—no, no! I loved you when you didn't let me take you prisoner! There was no war! There is only you!"

"We needed a house for—for our honeymoon," he suggested.

"No! no! Let us go to the mine for our honeymoon. The mine—that is *yours*, you see. I'm to wait under the shade of the tree on the plateau and you're to bring me the gold."

"And there will be new mines and new tasks—and you, always."

"Always!"

While she went from room to room, with words of delight for his thoughtfulness in restoring every familiar article that could be procured, Marcus Aurelius was digging up certain garments that he had buried in a box in the garden. When he announced dinner that night, his face was shining from overmuch soap and water, and he wore the snuff-colored, brass-buttoned spiketail of Parisian memory. Contrary to his prophecy, he did not drop dead with delight, probably because he did not want any upstart to take his place behind his new master's chair.

THE END

THIS BOOK IS DUE ON THE LAST DATE
STAMPED BELOW

AN INITIAL FINE OF 25 CENTS
WILL BE ASSESSED FOR FAILURE TO RETURN
THIS BOOK ON THE DATE DUE. THE PENALTY
WILL INCREASE TO 50 CENTS ON THE FOURTH
DAY AND TO \$1.00 ON THE SEVENTH DAY
OVERDUE.

APR 7 1933

FEB 7 1934

JUL 1 1935

FEB 10 1941 M

576263

UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA LIBRARY

